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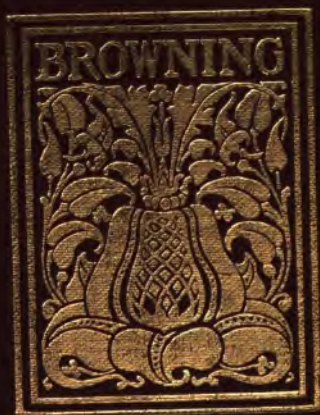
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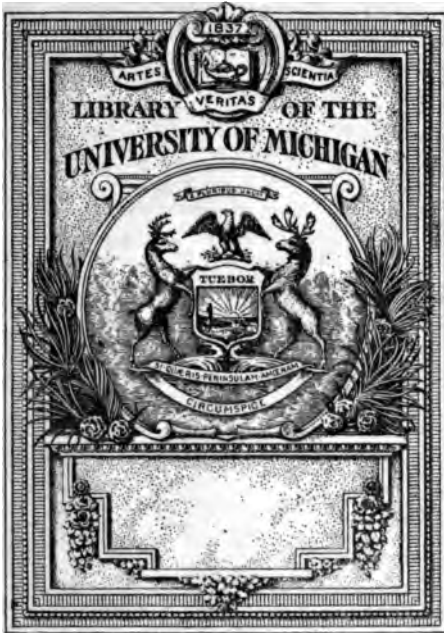
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RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

THE INN ALBUM

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC









Portrait of  
James  
D. D.  
1850

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

1



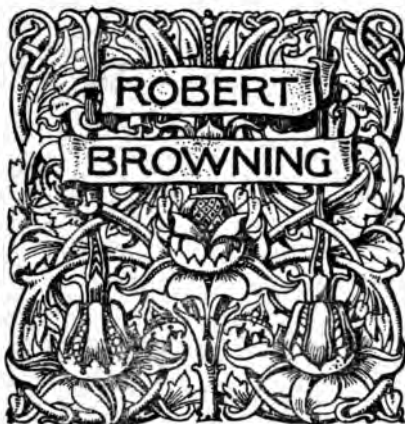
**ROBERT BROWNING AT MIDDLE AGE.**

*(From a Photograph by the London Stereoscopic Company.)*

RED COTTON NIGHT-  
CAP COUNTRY

THE INN ALBUM

THE TWO POETS OF  
CROISIC



THOMAS Y CROWELL  
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RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY  
THE INN ALBUM  
THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

*From the Author's Revised Text*

*Edited with Introductions and Notes by*

CHARLOTTE PORTER AND HELEN A. CLARKE

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## INTRODUCTION.

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NOVELS in verse the first two poems in this volume might well be called, for in them actual tragic stories have been thrown into artistic form, and the novelist's prerogatives taken of seeing into the inmost souls of the actors, so that their natures and motives are laid bare before the reader.

The manner of presenting the story is with both poems unique in Browning's work : that employed in the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is indirect description carried on in a conversational vein, as the poet relates the incidents to his friend Miss Thackeray, and embellishes them with his penetrating character analysis, or illuminating excursions into the history of the time ; while that of "The Inn Album" is direct description of the action, every character being made to speak inside one set of quotation marks, not in the complex dramatic fashion of many of the monologues where quotations within quotations demand constant alertness on the part of the reader if he would keep clearly in mind the separate characters.

The effect resulting from the different styles adopted in these two poems is that the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is distinguished by a sort of rambling

gossipiness, reminding one, if it must be said, of the proverbial old woman's way of telling a story, though the gossip be on the plane of psychology, and the rambling be into the by-ways of history, and accordingly there is not that rapidity of movement usual to Browning when he is treating a purely romantic theme, in which the characters, instead of having their development described after the event, are made to unfold themselves. The contrast between this and "The Inn Album" is the more marked because the latter differs from the poet's ordinary style by being more rapid, owing to the fact that terse and telling bits of direct description constantly put the scene before the reader, while Browning's accustomed way is to present the scene by means of the casual remarks of the speakers about their surroundings. And from this it also follows that each speaker, intent upon what he has to say, can say it more directly and pointedly than he could if he were made to interweave his speech with constant innuendoes and allusions glimpsing the environment or the mental perspective.

Probably few readers could turn to the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" for the first time and not feel irritated at the interminable talk indulged in by the poet before he reaches the gist of the story. It is, in fact, a sort of looking-glass country, where the end is always reached before the beginning. The intention being to tell about a red night-cap country, the poet begins with a long talk about white night-caps; and when he wants to illustrate by means of an exhibition of night-caps, he first enlarges upon a fiddle-show, and finally, when through this tantalizing teasing of a colossus at play the red night-cap emerges, the game is *not by any means over*, for the end of the story is told

first, which gives a fresh opportunity for fancy to range in concocting some story not the right one to lead up to the tragedy of Miranda's suicide. It must be admitted, however, that after the story is once known there is a certain fascination in following these mental gymnastics of the poet. It stands almost as a revelation of the exact workings of a mind of extraordinary mental activity, to which one thought suggests such an infinite variety of other thoughts parallel and contrasting that only by first becoming familiar with all the subjects touched upon by the poet, and then thinking along with him, can you get yourself into a mood thoroughly sympathetic with the poem.

The poet, of course, constitutes himself analyst and critic of the actors in the tragedy as well as the recounter of the story. The broad problem suggested is whether an unconventional course under certain conditions may not have more actual good in it than a course which would commend itself as entirely praiseworthy to society at large, but would lack that absolute truth to one's own highest impulses, which are considered by Browning so important an element in the development of the soul. In this particular case, however, the problem is complicated by the wavering conviction of Miranda. His impulse of love toward Clara he knows, in his own soul, to be the best good of which his nature is capable; yet this impulse is at war with his inherited religious convictions, and he is unfortunately not strong enough either to accept the revelation through human love as a divine truth by means of which he may learn to distinguish between the intrinsically right and wrong and the right and wrong based upon the external conventions set up by society and the church, or, on the other hand, to live

according to his religious convictions. Therefore his whole life became a lie, fluctuating between his devotion to Clara and his reverence for "La Ravissante." His heart told him his love was right; his mind told him it was a sin; and, never developing to the point where his religion and his love could be made to harmonize, it was finally settled for him through an actual decay of his will. Superstition gained such control of him that he left himself in the hands of fate — or, in other words, threw himself upon the protection of "La Ravissante" — to decide the problem for him. He had complete confidence that she would decide it in his favor; and in Browning's estimation she did, though not in the way expected by Miranda. She did not suspend the laws of gravitation when he jumped from his Belvidere in faith that she would carry him through the air to her, and by this miracle bring about a new dispensation, where all wrong would be made right, but cut the Gordian knot by killing him who was too weak of will to work the problem out for himself.

It is perfectly evident all through the poem that Browning's sympathies are on the side of love, especially as under the conditions the laws of Church and State forbade a marriage. Yet the life of these two in their relation to each other was devoted, faithful, and true for twenty years, and the question obtrudes itself as to

" Which arrogates  
Stability, this tent or those far towers?  
May not the temporary structure suit  
The stable circuit, co-exist in peace?"

implying that the true and devoted love, governed by law was more stable than the love governed by love, — such

ment in relation to French life, where the *mariage de convenance* is the rule.

Browning considers Clara less of a failure than Miranda, because she had not even developed to the point where moral problems troubled her, and simply attached herself instinctively to anything which was good for her; and, finding Miranda eminently good for her, was, true to her nature, faithful to him, sympathetic with his moods, her music adapted to his words with such absolute harmoniousness as to attain perfection in her small way. One suspects that the poet may not have been quite just here to Clara, or, since she is his own creation, that he might have created her somewhat differently, as a woman whose soul was first called to life by this true impulse of love, and who through it realized "the worth of love in man's estate," but with a woman's true penetration understood Miranda's temperament so thoroughly that she knew any attempt to bring him to a clear realization of this truth would send him into the clutches of his inherited conventions, and he would thus lose even the troubled satisfaction he took in their love; so that, instead of her not being wise enough to help him, he might have represented her as being too wise to help him any more than she did.

Sarcasm and humor are weapons always at Browning's disposal when he chooses to use them; and in this poem he has not spared either in his portrayal of the highly respectable cousins who sought with such religious pertinacity their own material welfare, to be gained through diverting Miranda's money into their own channels; or of the lady mother so safely ennobled upon the towers, who spends her time in *la bézique*; or the Church, so strict in the letter

of the law, but so willing to wink at iniquity from its own point of view, for the sake of the gifts which come to its coffers. Like Carlyle, the poet everywhere cries out against sham ; and in this bit of French world he has made live for us he discerns lies crouching everywhere under the cloak of the respectable, and the truth raising its head aloft in this true love of two beings scorned by society, and scarcely aware themselves of its own value.

The "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," in spite of the tragic life and death therein portrayed, has its gleam of sunshine ; but "The Inn Album" is all sombre. In comparison with the elder man in this poem, Miranda shines forth almost as a saint. It is certainly better to have two warring ideals than none at all ; and this man, if he ever had any possibilities in his nature of aspiring toward the light, had allowed them to become entirely choked up with the lowest of selfish instincts. At times in his talk with the young man he seems to show some consciousness that he had missed the best of life ; but even his best was so diluted with the selfish desire to *be* happy rather than to create happiness that it may well be doubted whether his soul was not so far gone in decay that regeneration was impossible. It is evident that the young woman whom he had betrayed felt thus in regard to him ; for her scorn and distrust are complete when he meets her at the Inn and again tries to win her in words that are moving and piteous enough, but which fall upon deaf ears, not so much because love is entirely dead within her, for she has never been able to throw off the spell he exerted over her, but because she sees behind these words a treacherous nature bent *upon getting what it wants* at the moment at any ex-

pense, even willing to pose as a penitent soul awaiting her touch to blossom into a new and better life, but incapable of cherishing the gift once it should come into his possession. His subsequent fall to the lowest depths of degradation, when she holds her own against him, and, brought to bay, he shows the cruel fangs of a wild beast, seems to prove that she had read him aright. Yet Browning so rarely presents a soul without some seeds of good within it, that one is prone to wonder whether less scorn and more charity, albeit with no loss of strength on the part of the lady, might not have been a means of bringing what few seeds of good there were in him to life, so that the "ape and tiger" might have had some fair chance of dying. Could the love of the lady and the young man for him have been evoked by anything but some good asleep within his soul? Or may the intrinsically evil put on such a beauteous seeming as to deceive even love itself?

Admirable as the lady is in many respects, she had not a strong enough moral insight to cope with him, or to direct her own energies so that her life might come to some good. However, it must be remembered in extenuation that she was a young girl, motherless, with no knowledge of life, when there came upon her the horror of such an awakening as she had never dreamed possible. With strength sufficient to save herself from the degradation of so-called "honorable" amends, she was not strong enough to see that her own life might yet be made worth something; thus, with the idea of self-sacrifice and atonement, she plunged herself into a relation which went against every tendency of her at once liberal and artistic nature. Besides, she did not seem to recognize that the old and poor parson should have



his rights, though so starved in soul, and should not have been deluded, even though his ideal of marriage was meagre enough, into a union upon a basis still worse than his own. Her lack of truth toward him met its inevitable consequences by putting her so much in the power of the betrayer that her only escape was suicide.

The sole good evolved from all this sin and weakness was its development of the nobility latent within the young man, who reached by means of it a pinnacle rarely attained, where love, transcending the accidents of life, was content if it might only serve the beloved one, and render by the smallest fraction her life more tolerable.

What the future might have in store for him and the lovable young cousin is left to the imagination, and may be filled in in harmony with each one's own ideals.

The unsolved and even unsolvable problem presented by this intense bit of realism awakens as many thoughts as the problems with which Ibsen is so fond of ending his dramas, and it is probably useless to suggest how otherwise the action might have been rounded out, for as Ibsen said about his Nora, "My Nora could not have acted any other way than she did," so these two beings who had struck athwart each other's paths must needs follow out the truth of their own natures, until, as Pompilia says, they should come in some future life under God's shadow.

Dramatically speaking, the poem is an artistic triumph. The talk everywhere grows inevitably out of the situations, and reveals the external personality as well as the souls of the actors, first as they have *stumblingly shaped* their lives since the first clash of

spirit against spirit, and then in the terrible moment when they all meet again in the final crisis. Mr. Arthur Symons, one of the few Browning commentators who has been able to look beyond the unpleasantness of the story and see its power artistically as a masterly study of character, speaks with force when he points out that "the elder man is one of Browning's most finished studies, and, morally, one of the worst characters even he has ever investigated. He is at once bad, clever, and cynical, the combination of all others, most noxious and most hopeless. He prides himself, above all things, on his intellect, and it is evident that he has had the power to shape his course and sway others. But now at fifty he knows himself to be a miserable failure;" that in the woman we see a being "physically the same, spiritually the ghost of her former self, the subtlety of the picture" being "to show what she is now, while making equally plain what she was in the past — a figure not so much pathetic as terrible." Even more appreciative are his remarks concerning the young man: "Pathetic, and above all pathetic, despite the comic veneer, which, perhaps, only strengthens the impression, is the figure of the young man, the great, rough, foolish, rich youth, tutored in evil by his Mephistopheles, but only, we fancy, skin-deep in it, slow of thought but quick of feeling, with his one and only love never forgotten. . . . His last speech, with its clumsy yet genuine chivalry, its touching, broken words, its intrinsic delicacy and faltering expression, is one of the most pathetic things I know."

Finally, it is to be noted that the atmosphere of this poem is as distinctively English as that of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country" is French. The

impecunious aristocrat; the rich "snob;" the poor clergyman, who does tutoring to eke out a scanty living, with a beautiful daughter sensitive and refined beyond any possibilities her surroundings had to offer her; the other elderly clergymian, whose one æsthetic joy, reading Dickens, had been swallowed up in his anxiety over souls; the stuffy inn, where the tragedy is enacted, with its utterly commonplace album, furnishing at once a grim element of humor, and the fatal instrument with which the villain works his designs, — all speak of a land riddled by caste ideals, where a man may be a man for "a' that," but a gentleman is equally a gentleman for "a' that," no matter what iniquities may be included in "a' that." A *chateau* takes the place of the inn as the *mise en scène* of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," and the *deus ex machina* is a sumptuous statue of the Virgin instead of an inn album. Art and good taste reign instead of sordidness and vulgarity, yet the hero in England would have been a rich "snob." In more democratic France, however, he is a cultured gentleman, with æsthetic tastes that might shame the English aristocrat. These are only fresh examples of the fidelity or, perhaps, unerring instinct always exercised by Browning in suiting his setting to his subject. "The Two Poets of Croisic," which concludes this volume, furnishes the appropriate relaxation of Comedy to nerves overstrung by the preceding Tragedies.

It has points of kinship, however, with the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country." The scene fluctuates in both between a little town and Paris, and in both the style is that of conversational story-telling.

Sitting by the fire of driftwood, with its brilliantly

colored flames, the poet tells his companion the story of these two forgotten poets, seemingly suggested by the driftwood which carries him to Brittany and the life of the flames which reminds him of the childish game of naming the flames, and watching them as they die out. This is quite a simple preamble in comparison with that introducing the theme of the "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," but the manner is similar.

The remarkable thing about these Croisic poets is not that they should have been forgotten, but that they should ever have been famous. Their fame was evidently not due in any respect to the superior merit of the verses, but to entirely fortuitous circumstances, which kindled a sudden fire of enthusiasm just as suddenly to die out.

A homily upon the ephemerality of fame might doubtless be evolved from such good texts, if it were not that the age, the individual characteristics, and even the race characteristics, should be taken into account before sweeping generalizations are made. René Gentilhomme's prophecy would have been considered only a coincidence in a more enlightened age. La Roque and Voltaire would not have bowed before a woman poetess of little genius except in an age when genius was not expected to reside in womankind at all, and when literary aspiration on the part of a woman, if accompanied by sufficient modesty, was regarded as the amiable and interesting attempts of a bird, by nature wingless, to fly.

Then the French nation has always been subject to wild enthusiasms. France has but recently given an exhibition of the manner in which it is capable of hounding one of its most distinguished geniuses, *Zola*,

because its enthusiasm for the present moment happens to be the integrity of the army at any cost. A little while since it lost its social head in admiration for the Russians, in consequence of which the whole world has since been wearing exaggerated forms of Russian blouses. So can the enthusiasms of France, be they worthy or unworthy, move the world! The poet's humorous hits at the "Academy" and the learned "Forty" show his appreciation of the fact that France, even with her thinking-cap on, has been known to let enthusiasm run off with her in the wrong direction, and keep its geniuses dangling round the Parnassian doors an unconscionably long time.

The thoughts suggested to the poet by the lives of these two forgotten ones appear elsewhere in his poetry.

In "The Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician," Browning shows the practical disadvantage it is to a human being to have had a veritable glimpse of the Infinite, as in the case of Lazarus. It is something like the old myth of Phaeton driving the sun's chariot. His human skill was unequal to the task of managing Apollo's steeds, so human vision is confused by becoming conscious of the infinite point of view, and cannot distinguish in a manner necessary for proper guidance through life the relative laws of right and wrong. Such, he imagines, might have been the case with René, and the cause why he wrote no more poetry; and such revelations of the divine Browning concludes are a misfortune, for only by being our human selves can we find true development.

The other thought suggested is, "What shall be the test of value of a poet's work, since fame proves so poor a test?" And the answer is, "That poet who *lives the happiest life.*" Such a poet is one who

possesses a consciousness above his passions and emotions, and is able to turn these emotional manifestations into artistic channels. This carries us back to the poet of "Pauline," who describes himself, as pointed out in the introductory remarks on "Pauline," as having this sort of over-consciousness. It does not seem to have produced happiness in him, because it was linked with the desire to be and experience all. In other words, the over-consciousness was there, but the passions and desires had not yet come under its complete control. According to this, Browning, it seems, did not believe in the popular superstition that the best poet is he who is possessed by a dæmon, but he who himself, the supremely conscious, dæmon, possesses all his faculties of mind and heart and soul as artistic material.

CHARLOTTE PORTER.  
HELEN A. CLARKE.



RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP  
COUNTRY,

OR

TURF AND TOWERS.

1873.

TO

MISS THACKERAY.

I.

AND so, here happily we meet, fair friend!  
Again once more, as if the years rolled back  
And this our meeting-place were just that Rome  
Out in the champaign, say, o'er-rioted  
By verdure, ravage, and gay winds that war  
Against strong sunshine settled to his sleep;  
Or on the Paris Boulevard, might it prove,  
You and I came together saunteringly,  
Bound for some shop-front in the Place Vendôme —  
Gold-smithy and Golconda mine, that makes 10  
“The Firm-Miranda” blazed about the world —  
Or, what if it were London, where my toe  
Trespassed upon your flounce? “Small blame,” you  
smile,

Seeing the Staircase Party in the Square  
Was Small and Early, and you broke no rib.

Even as we met where we have met so oft,  
Now meet we on this unpretending beach

R. C. — I



## 2 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Below the little village : little, ay !  
But pleasant, may my gratitude subjoin ?  
Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-place, 20  
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-ful Normandy !  
That, just behind you, is mine own hired house :  
With right of pathway through the field in front,  
No prejudice to all its growth unsheaved  
Of emerald luzern bursting into blue.  
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall,  
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate !  
Yon yellow — what if not wild-mustard flower ? —  
Of that, my naked sole makes lawful prize,  
Bruising the acrid aromatics out, 30  
Till, what they preface, good salt savors sting  
From, first, the sifted sands, then sands in slab,  
Smooth save for pipy wreath-work of the worm :  
(Granite and mussel-shell are ground alike  
To glittering paste, — the live worm troubles yet.)  
Then, dry and moist, the varech limit-line,  
Burnt cinder-black, with brown uncrumpled swathe  
Of berried softness, sea-swoln thrice its size ;  
And, lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last,  
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain. 40

Such is Saint-Rambert, wilder very much  
Than Joyeux, that famed Joyous-Gard of yours,  
Some five miles farther down ; much homelier too --  
Right for me, — right for you the fine and fair !  
Only, I could endure a transfer — wrought  
By angels famed still, through our countryside,  
For weights they fetched and carried in old time  
When nothing like the need was — transfer, just  
Of Joyeux church, exchanged for yonder prig,  
*Our brand-new stone cream-colored masterpiece.* 50

Well — and you know, and not since this one year.  
 The quiet seaside country? So do I:  
 Who like it, in a manner, just because  
 Nothing is prominently likable  
 To vulgar eye without a soul behind,  
 Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball  
 Of sight, a beauty buried everywhere.  
 If we have souls, know how to see and use,  
 One place performs, like any other place,  
 The proper service every place on earth 60  
 Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike  
 To give him note that, through the place he sees,  
 A place is signified he never saw,  
 But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know.  
 Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment  
 May suffer, through its single rent in roof,  
 Admittance of a cataract of light  
 Beyond attainment through earth's palace-panes  
 Pinholed athwart their windowed filagree  
 By twinklings sobered from the sun outside. 70  
 Doubtless the High Street of our village here  
 Imposes hardly as Rome's Corso could:  
 And our projected race for sailing-boats  
 Next Sunday, when we celebrate our Saint,  
 Falls very short of that attractiveness,  
 That artistry in festive spectacle,  
 Paris ensures you when she welcomes back  
 (When shall it be?) the Assembly from Versailles;  
 While the best fashion and intelligence  
 Collected at the counter of our Mayor 80  
 (Dry goods he deals in, grocery beside)  
 What time the post-bag brings the news from  
 Vire, —  
 I fear me much, it scarce would hold its own,

#### 4 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

That circle, that assorted sense and wit,  
With Five o'clock Tea in a house we know.

Still, 'tis the check that gives the leap its lift.  
The nullity of cultivated souls,  
Even advantaged by their news from Vire,  
Only conduces to enforce the truth  
That, thirty paces off, this natural blue 90  
Broods o'er a bag of secrets, all unbroached,  
Beneath the bosom of the placid deep,  
Since first the Post Director sealed them safe ;  
And formidable I perceive this fact —  
Little Saint-Rambert touches the great sea.  
From London, Paris, Rome, where men are men,  
Not mice, and mice not Mayors presumably,  
Thought scarce may leap so fast, alight so far.  
But this is a pretence, you understand,  
Disparagement in play, to parry thrust 100  
Of possible objector : nullity  
And ugliness, the taunt be his, not mine  
Nor yours, — I think we know the world too well !  
Did you walk hither, jog it by the plain,  
Or jaunt it by the highway, braving bruise  
From springless and uncushioned vehicle ?  
Much, was there not, in place and people both,  
To lend an eye to ? and what eye like yours —  
The learned eye is still the loving one !  
Our land : its quietude, productiveness, 110  
Its length and breadth of grain-crop, meadow-ground,  
Its orchards in the pasture, farms a-field  
And hamlets on the road-edge, naught you missed  
Of one and all the sweet rusticities !  
From stalwart strider by the wagon-side,  
*Brightening the acre with his purple blouse,*

To those dark-featured comely women-folk,  
 Healthy and tall, at work, and work indeed,  
 On every cottage door-step, plying brisk  
 Bobbins that bob you ladies one such lace ! 120  
 Oh, you observed ! and how that nimble play  
 Of finger formed the sole exception, bobbed  
 The one disturbance to the peace of things,  
 Where nobody esteems it worth his while,  
 If time upon the clock-face goes asleep,  
 To give the rusted hands a helpful push.  
 Nobody lifts an energetic thumb  
 And index to remove some dead and gone  
 Notice which, posted on the barn, repeats  
 For truth what two years' passage made a lie. 130  
 Still is for sale, next June, that same château  
 With all its immobilities, — were sold  
 Duly next June behind the last but last ;  
 And, woe 's me, still placards the Emperor  
 His confidence in war he means to wage,  
 God aiding and the rural populace.  
 No : rain and wind must rub the rags away  
 And let the lazy land untroubled snore.

Ah, in good truth ? and did the drowsihead  
 So suit, so soothe the learned loving eye, 140  
 That you were minded to confer a crown,  
 (Does not the poppy boast such ?) — call the land  
 By one slow hither-thither stretching, fast  
 Subsiding-into-slumber sort of name,  
 Symbolic of the place and people too,  
 “ *White Cotton Night-cap Country* ? ” Excellent !  
 For they do, all, dear women young and old,  
 Upon the heads of them bear notably  
 This badge of soul and body in repose ;

## 6 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top, 150  
Keeps woolly ward above that oval brown,  
Its placid feature, more than muffler makes  
A safeguard, circumvents intelligence  
In — what shall evermore be named and famed,  
If happy nomenclature aught avail,  
“ *White Cotton Night-cap Country.*”

Do I hear —

Oh, better, very best of all the news —  
You mean to catch and cage the winged word,  
And make it breed and multiply at home  
Till Norman idlesse stock our England too? 160  
Normandy shown minute yet magnified  
In one of those small books, the truly great,  
We never know enough, yet know so well?  
How I foresee the cursive diamond-dints, —  
Composite pen that plays the pencil too, —  
As, touch the page and up the glamour goes,  
And filmily o'er grain-crop, meadow-ground,  
O'er orchard in the pasture, farm a-field  
And hamlet on the road-edge, floats and forms  
And falls, at lazy last of all, the Cap 170  
That crowns the country! we, awake outside,  
Farther than ever from the imminence  
Of what cool comfort, what close coverture  
Your magic, deftly weaving, shall surround  
The unconscious captives with. Be theirs to drowse  
Trammelled, and ours to watch the trammel-trick!  
Ours be it, as we con the book of books,  
To wonder how is winking possible!

All hail, “ *White Cotton Night-cap Country,*” then!  
And yet, as on the beach you promise book, — 180  
*On beach, mere razor-edge 'twixt earth and sea,*

I stand at such a distance from the world  
 That 't is the whole world which obtains regard,  
 Rather than any part, though part presumed  
 A perfect little province in itself,  
 When wayfare made acquaintance first therewith.  
 So standing, therefore, on this edge of things,  
 What if the backward glance I gave, return  
 Loaded with other spoils of vagrancy  
 Than I despatched it for, till I propose 190  
 The question — puzzled by the sudden store  
 Official fancy plumps beneath my nose —  
 “ Which sort of Night-cap have you glorified ? ”

You would be gracious to my ignorance :  
 “ What other Night-cap than the normal one ? —  
 Old honest guardian of man's head and hair  
 In its elastic yet continuous, soft,  
 No less persisting, circumambient gripe, —  
 Night's notice, life is respited from day !  
 Its form and fashion vary, suiting so 200  
 Each seasonable want of youth and age.  
 In infancy, the rosy naked ball  
 Of brain, and that faint golden fluff it bears,  
 Are smothered from disaster, — nurses know  
 By what foam-fabric ; but when youth succeeds,  
 The sterling value of the article  
 Discards adornment, cap is cap henceforth  
 Unfeathered by the futile row on row.  
 Manhood strains hard a sturdy stocking-stuff  
 O'er well-deserving head and ears : the cone 210  
 Is tassel-tipt, commendably takes pride,  
 Announcing workday done and wages pouched,  
 And liberty obtained to sleep, nay, snore  
 Unwise, he peradventure shall essay

## 8 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

The sweets of independency for once —  
Waive its advantage on his wedding-night :  
Fool, only to resume it, night the next,  
And never part companionship again.  
Since, with advancing years, night's solace soon  
Intrudes upon the daybreak dubious life                    220  
Persuades it to appear the thing it is,  
Half-sleep ; and so, encroaching more and more,  
It lingers long past the abstemious meal  
Of morning, and, as prompt to serve, precedes  
The supper-summons, gruel grown a feast.  
Finally, when the last sleep finds the eye  
So tired it cannot even shut itself,  
Does not a kind domestic hand unite  
Friend to friend, lid from lid to part no more,  
Consigned alike to that receptacle                    230  
So bleak without, so warm and white within ?

“Night-caps, night's comfort of the human race :  
Their usage may be growing obsolete,  
Still, in the main, the institution stays.  
And though yourself may possibly have lived,  
And probably will die, undignified —  
The Never-night-capped — more experienced folk  
Laugh you back answer — What should Night-cap be  
Save Night-cap pure and simple ? Sorts of such ?  
Take cotton for the medium, cast an eye                    240  
This side to comfort, lambswool or the like,  
That side to frilly cambric costliness,  
And all between proves Night-cap proper.” Add  
“Fiddle !” and I confess the argument.

Only, your ignoramus here again  
*Proceeds as tardily to recognize*

Distinctions: ask him what a fiddle means,  
 And "Just a fiddle" seems the apt reply.  
 Yet, is not there, while we two pace the beach,  
 This blessed moment, at your Kensington, 250  
 A special Fiddle-Show and rare array  
 Of all the sorts were ever set to check,  
 'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-hand-wise,  
 Or touched lute-fashion and forefinger-plucked?  
 I doubt not there be duly catalogued  
 Achievements all and some of Italy,  
 Guarnerius, Straduaris, — old and new,  
 Augustly rude, refined to finicking,  
 This mammoth with his belly full of blare,  
 That mouse of music — inch-long silvery wheeze. 260  
 And here a specimen has effloresced  
 Into the scroll-head, there subsides supreme,  
 And with the tail-piece satisfies mankind.  
 Why should I speak of woods, grains, stains and streaks,  
 The topaz varnish or the ruby gum?  
 We preferably pause where tickets teach  
 "Over this sample would Corelli croon,  
 Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove,  
 Most dulcet Giga, dreamiest Saraband."  
 "From this did Paganini comb the fierce 270  
 Electric sparks, or to tenuity  
 Pull forth the inmost wailing of the wire —  
 No cat-gut could swoon out so much of soul!"

Three hundred violin-varieties  
 Exposed to public view! And dare I doubt  
 Some future enterprise shall give the world  
 Quite as remarkable a Night-cap-show?  
 Methinks, we, arm-in-arm, that festal day,  
 Pace the long range of relics shrined aright,



10 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Framed, glazed, each cushioned curiosity,                    280  
And so begin to smile and to inspect :  
“ Pope’s sickly head-sustainment, damped with dews  
Wrung from the all-unfair fight : such a frame —  
Though doctor and the devil helped their best —  
Fought such a world that, waiving doctor’s help,  
Had the mean devil at its service too !  
Voltaire’s imperial velvet ! Hogarth eyed  
The thumb-nail record of some alley-phiz,  
Then chucklingly clapped yonder cosiness  
On pate, and painted with true flesh and blood ! 290  
Poor hectic Cowper’s soothing sarsnet-stripe ! ”  
And so we profit by the catalogue,  
Somehow our smile subsiding more and more,  
Till we decline into . . . but no ! shut eyes  
And hurry past the shame uncoffined here,  
The hangman’s toilet ! If we needs must trench,  
For science’ sake which craves completeness still,  
On the sad confine, not the district’s self,  
The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France : 300  
It is historic, and we live to learn,  
And try to learn by reading story-books.  
It is an incident of ’Ninety-two,  
And, twelve months since, the Commune had the  
sway.

Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites  
Presented you, a solitary Red  
Shall pain us both, a minute and no more !  
Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front  
Of palace-window, in persuasion’s name,  
A spectacle above the howling mob  
Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,

The outstart, the first spirt of blood on brow,  
 The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,  
 The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth  
 At odds with that half-purpose to be strong  
 And merely patient under misery!  
 And note the ejaculation, ground so hard  
 Between his teeth, that only God could hear,  
 As the lean pale proud insignificance  
 With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare 320  
 Out of the two gray points that did him stead  
 And passed their eagle-owner to the front  
 Better than his mob-elbowed undersize, —  
 The Corsican lieutenant commented  
 “Had I but one good regiment of my own,  
 How soon should volleys to the due amount  
 Lay stiff upon the street-flags this *canaille!*  
 As for the droll there, he that plays the king  
 And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,  
 He’s done for! Somebody must take his place.” 330  
 White Cotton Night-cap Country: excellent!  
 Why not Red Cotton Night-cap Country too?

“Why not say swans are black and blackbirds white,  
 Because the instances exist?” you ask.  
 “Enough that white, not red, predominates,  
 Is normal, typical, in cleric phrase  
*Quod semel, semper, et ubique.*” Here,  
 Applying such a name to such a land,  
 Especially you find inopportune,  
 Impertinent, my scruple whether white 340  
 Or red describes the local color best.  
 “Let be” (you say), “the universe at large  
 Supplied us with exceptions to the rule,  
 So manifold, they bore no passing-by, —

## 12 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Little Saint-Rambert has conserved at least  
The pure tradition : white from head to heel,  
Where is a hint of the ungracious hue ?  
See, we have traversed with hop, step and jump,  
From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,  
Measured the garment (help my metaphor !) 350  
Not merely criticised the cap, forsooth ;  
And were you pricked by that collecting-itch,  
That pruriency for writing o'er your reds  
' Rare, rarer, rarest, not rare but unique,' —  
The shelf, Saint-Rambert, of your cabinet,  
Unlabelled, — virginal, no Rahab-thread  
For blushing token of the spy's success, —  
Would taunt with vacancy, I undertake !  
What, yonder is your best apology,  
Pretence at most approach to naughtiness, 360  
Impingement of the ruddy on the blank ?  
This is the criminal Saint-Rambertese  
Who smuggled in tobacco, half-a-pound !  
The Octroi found it out and fined the wretch.  
This other is the culprit who despatched  
A hare, he thought a hedgehog (clods obstruct),  
Unfurnished with Permission for the Chase !  
As to the womankind — renounce from those  
The hope of getting a companion-tinge,  
First faint touch promising romantic fault ! " 370

Enough : there stands Red Cotton Night-cap shelf —  
A cavern's ostentatious vacancy —  
My contribution to the show ; while yours —  
Whites heap your row of pegs from every hedge  
Outside, and house inside Saint-Rambert here —  
We soon have come to end of. See, the church  
*With its white steeple* gives your challenge point,

Perks as it were the night-cap of the town,  
 Starchedly warrants all beneath is matched  
 By all above, one snowy innocence ! 380

You put me on my mettle. British maid  
 And British man, suppose we have it out  
 Here in the fields, decide the question ?  
 Then, British fashion, shake hands hard again,  
 Go home together, friends the more confirmed  
 That one of us — assuredly myself —  
 Looks puffy about eye, and pink at nose ?  
 Which “pink” reminds me that the arduousness  
 We both acknowledge in the enterprise,  
 Claims, counts upon a large and liberal 390  
 Acceptance of as good as victory

In whatsoever just escapes defeat.  
 You must be generous, strain point, and call  
 Victory, any the least flush of pink  
 Made prize of, labelled scarlet for the nonce —  
 Faintest pretension to be wrong and red  
 And picturesque, that varies by a splotch  
 The righteous flat of insipidity.

Quick to the quest, then — forward, the firm foot !  
 Onward, the quarry-overtaking eye ! 400  
 For, what is this, by way of march-tune, makes  
 The musicalest buzzing at my ear  
 By reassurance of that promise old  
*Though sins are scarlet they shall be as wool ?*  
 Whence — what fantastic hope do I deduce ?  
 I am no Liebig : when the dyer dyes  
 A texture, can the red dye prime the white ?  
 And if we washed well, wrung the texture hard,  
 Would we arrive, here, there and everywhere,  
 At a fierce ground beneath the surface meek ? 410

#### 14 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

I take the first chance, rub to threads what rag  
Shall flutter snowily in sight. For see !  
Already these few yards upon the rise,  
Our back to brave Saint-Rambert, how we reach  
The open, at a dozen steps or strides !  
Turn round and look about, a breathing-while !  
There lie, outspread at equidistance, thorpes  
And villages and towns along the coast,  
Distinguishable, each and all alike,  
By white persistent Night-cap, spire on spire. 420  
Take the left : yonder town is — what say you  
If I say “ Londres ” ? Ay, the mother-mouse  
(Reversing fable, as truth can and will)  
Which gave our mountain of a London birth !  
This is the Conqueror's country, bear in mind,  
And Londres-district blooms with London-pride.  
Turn round : La Roche, to right, where oysters thrive :  
Monlieu — the lighthouse is a telegraph ;  
This, full in front, Saint-Rambert ; then succeeds 429  
Villeneuve, and Pons the Young with Pons the Old,  
And — ere faith points to Joyeux, out of sight,  
A little nearer — oh, La Ravissante !

There now is something like a Night-cap spire,  
Donned by no ordinary Notre-Dame !  
For, one of the three safety-guards of France,  
You front now, lady ! Nothing intercepts  
The privilege, by crow-flight, two miles far.  
She and her sisters Lourdes and La Salette  
Are at this moment hailed the cynosure  
Of poor dear France, such waves have buffeted 440  
Since she eschewed infallibility  
And chose to steer by the vague compass-box.  
*This same midsummer month, a week ago,*

Was not the memorable day observed  
 For reinstatement of the misused Three  
 In old supremacy for evermore ?  
 Did not the faithful flock in pilgrimage  
 By railway, diligence and steamer — nay  
 On foot with staff and scrip, to see the sights  
 Assured them ? ' And I say best sight was here : 450  
 And nothing justified the rival Two  
 In their pretension to equality ;  
 Our folk laid out their ticket-money best,  
 And wiseliest, if they walked, wore shoe away ;  
 Not who went farther only to fare worse.  
 For, what was seen at Lourdes and La Salette  
 Except a couple of the common cures  
 Such as all three can boast of, any day ?  
 While here it was, here and by no means there, 459  
 That the Pope's self sent two great real gold crowns  
 As thick with jewelry as thick could stick,  
 His present to the Virgin and her Babe —  
 Provided for — who knows not ? — by that fund,  
 Count Alessandro Sforza's legacy,  
 Which goes to crown some Virgin every year.  
 But this year, poor Pope was in prison-house,  
 And money had to go for something else ;  
 And therefore, though their present seemed the Pope's,  
 The faithful of our province raised the sum 469  
 Preached and prayed out of — nowise purse alone.  
 Gentle and simple paid in kind, not cash,  
 The most part : the great lady gave her brooch,  
 The peasant-girl her hair-pin ; 't was the rough  
 Bluff farmer mainly who, — admonished well  
 By wife to care lest his new colewort-crop  
 Stray sorrowfully sparse like last year's seed, —  
 Lugged from reluctant pouch the fifty-franc,

16 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

And had the Curé's hope that rain would cease.  
 And so, the sum in evidence at length,  
 Next step was to obtain the donative 480  
 By the spontaneous bounty of the Pope —  
 No easy matter, since his Holiness  
 Had turned a deaf ear, long and long ago,  
 To much entreaty on our Bishop's part,  
 Commendably we boast. "But no," quoth he,  
 "Image and image needs must take their turn :  
 Here stand a dozen as importunate."  
 Well, we were patient ; but the cup ran o'er  
 When — who was it pressed in and took the prize  
 But our own offset, set far off indeed 490  
 To grow by help of our especial name,  
 She of the Ravissante — in Martinique !  
 "What ?" cried our patience at the boiling-point,  
 "The daughter crowned, the mother's head goes bare ?  
 Bishop of Raimboux !" — that 's our diocese —  
 "Thou hast a summons to repair to Rome,  
 Be efficacious at the Council there :  
 Now is the time or never ! Right our wrong !  
 Hie thee away, thou valued Morillon,  
 And have the promise, thou who hast the vote !" 500  
 So said, so done, so followed in due course .  
 (To cut the story short) this festival,  
 This famous Twenty-second, seven days since.

Oh, but you heard at Joyeux ! Pilgrimage,  
 Concourse, procession with, to head the host,  
 Cardinal Mirecourt, quenching lesser lights :  
 The leafy street-length through, decked end to end  
 With August-strippage, and adorned with flags  
 That would have waved right well but that it rained .  
*Just this picked day, by some perversity.* 510

And so were placed, on Mother and on Babe,  
 The pair of crowns : the Mother's, you must see !  
 Miranda, the great Paris goldsmith, made  
 The marvel, — he 's a neighbor : that 's his park  
 Before you, tree-topped wall we walk toward.  
 His shop it was turned out the masterpiece,  
 Probably at his own expenditure ;  
 Anyhow, his was the munificence  
 Contributed the central and supreme  
 Splendor that crowns the crown itself, The Stone. 520  
 Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply  
 That gem : he had to forage in New-York,  
 This jeweller, and country-gentleman,  
 And most undoubted devotee beside !  
 Worthily wived, too : since his wife it was  
 Bestowed " with friendly hand " — befitting phrase !  
 The lace which trims the coronation-robe —  
 Stiff wear — a mint of wealth on the brocade.  
 Do go and see what I saw yesterday !  
 And, for that matter, see in fancy still,                    530  
 Since . . .

There now ! Even for unthankful me,  
 Who stuck to my devotions at high-tide  
 That festal morning, never had a mind  
 To trudge the little league and join the crowd —  
 Even for me is miracle vouchsafed !  
 How pointless proves the sneer at miracles !  
 As if, contrariwise to all we want  
 And reasonably look to find, they graced  
 Merely those graced-before, grace helps no whit,  
 Unless, made whole, they need physician still.                    540  
 I — sceptical in every inch of me —  
 Did I deserve that, from the liquid name



## 18 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

“Miranda,” — faceted as lovelily  
As his own gift, the gem, — a shaft should shine,  
Bear me along, another Abaris,  
Nor let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,  
And yonder lies in luminosity !

Look, lady ! where I bade you glance but now !  
Next habitation, though two miles away, —  
No tenement for man or beast between, — 550  
That, park and domicile, is country-seat  
Of this same good Miranda ! I accept  
The augury. Or there, or nowhere else,  
Will I establish that a Night-cap gleams  
Of visionary Red, not White for once !  
“Heaven” saith the sage “is with us, here inside  
Each man :” “Hell also,” simpleness subjoins,  
By White and Red describing human flesh.

And yet as we continue, quicken pace,  
Approach the object which determines me 560  
Victorious or defeated, more forlorn  
My chance seems, — that is certainty at least.  
Halt midway, reconnoitre ! Either side  
The path we traverse (turn and see) s retch fields  
Without a hedge : one level, scallop-striped  
With bands of beet and turnip and luzern,  
Limited only by each color’s end,  
Shelves down, — we stand upon an eminence, —  
To where the earth-shell scallops out the sea,  
A sweep of semicircle ; and at edge — 570  
Just as the milk-white incrustations stud  
At intervals some shell-extremity,  
So do the little growths attract us here,  
*Towns with each name I told you : say, they touch*

The sea, and the sea them, and all is said,  
 So sleeps and sets to slumber that broad blue !  
 The people are as peaceful as the place.  
 This, that I call "the path" is road, highway ;  
 But has there passed us by a market-cart,  
 Man, woman, child, or dog to wag a tail ? 580  
 True, I saw weeders stooping in a field ;  
 But — formidably white the Cap's extent !

Round again ! Come, appearance promises !  
 The boundary, the park-wall, ancient brick,  
 Upholds a second wall of tree-heads high  
 Which overlean its top, a solid green.  
 That surely ought to shut in mysteries !  
 A jeweller — no unsuggestive craft !  
 Trade that admits of much romance, indeed. 589  
 For, whom but goldsmiths used old monarchs pledge  
 Regalia to, or seek a ransom from,  
 Or pray to furnish dowry, at a pinch,  
 According to authentic story-books ?  
 Why, such have revolutionized this land  
 With diamond-necklace-dealing ! not to speak  
 Of families turned upside-down, because  
 The gay wives went and pawned clandestinely  
 Jewels, and figured, till found out, with paste,  
 Or else redeemed them — how, is horrible !  
 Then there are those enormous criminals 600  
 That love their ware and cannot lose their love,  
 And murder you to get your purchase back.  
 Others go courting after such a stone,  
 Make it their mistress, marry for their wife,  
 And find out, some day, it was false the while,  
 As ever wife or mistress, man too fond  
 Has named his Pilgrim, Hermit, Ace of Hearts.

20 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Beside — what style of edifice begins  
 To grow in sight at last and top the scene ?  
 That gray roof, with the range of *lucarnes*, four 610  
 I count, and that erection in the midst —  
 Clock-house, or chapel-spire, or what, above ?  
 Conventual, that, beyond manorial, sure !  
 And reason good ; for Clairvaux, such its name,  
 Was built of old to be a Priory,  
 Dependence on that Abbey-for-the-Males  
 Our Conqueror founded in world-famous Caen,  
 And where his body sought the sepulture  
 It was not to retain : you know the tale.  
 Such Priory was Clairvaux, prosperous 620  
 Hundreds of years ; but nothing lasts below,  
 And when the Red Cap pushed the Crown aside,  
 The Priory became, like all its peers,  
 A National Domain : which, bought and sold  
 And resold, needs must change, with ownership,  
 Both outside show and inside use ; at length  
 The message, three-and-twenty years ago,  
 Became the purchase of rewarded worth  
 Impersonate in Father — I must stoop  
 To French phrase for precision's sake, I fear — 630  
 Father Miranda, goldsmith of renown :  
 By birth a Madrilene, by domicile  
 And sojourning accepted French at last.  
 His energy it was which, trade transferred  
 To Paris, throve as with a golden thumb,  
 Established in the Place Vendôme. He bought  
 Not building only, but belongings far  
 And wide, at Gonthier there, Monlieu, Villeneuve,  
 A plentiful estate : which, twelve years since,  
 Passed, at the good man's natural demise, 640  
 To Son and Heir Miranda — Clairvaux here,

The Paris shop, the mansion — not to say  
 Palatial residence on Quai Rousseau,  
 With money, movables, a mine of wealth —  
 And young Léonce Miranda got it all.

Ah, but — whose might the transformation be ?  
 Were you prepared for this, now ? As we talked,  
 We walked, we entered the half-privacy,  
 The partly-guarded precinct : passed beside  
 The little paled-off islet, trees and turf, 650  
 Then found us in the main ash-avenue  
 Under the blessing of its branchage-roof.  
 Till, on emergence, what affronts our gaze ?  
 Priory — Conqueror — Abbey-for-the-Males —  
 Hey, presto, pass, who conjured all away ?  
 Look through the railwork of the gate : a park  
 — Yes, but *à l'Anglaise*, as they compliment !  
 Grass like green velvet, gravel-walks like gold,  
 Bosses of shrubs, emboscings of flowers,  
 Lead you — through sprinkled trees of tiny breed 660  
 Disporting, within reach of coverture,  
 By some habitual acquiescent oak  
 Or elm, that thinks, and lets the youngsters laugh —  
 Lead, lift at last your soul that walks the air,  
 Up to the house-front, or its back perhaps —  
 Whether façade or no, one coquetry  
 Of colored brick and carved stone ! Stucco ? Well,  
 The daintiness is cheery, that I know,  
 And all the sportive floral framework fits  
 The lightsome purpose of the architect. 670  
 Those *lucarnes* which I called conventual, late,  
 Those are the outlets in the *mansarde-roof* ;  
 And, underneath, what long light elegance  
 Of windows here suggests how brave inside

22 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Lurk eyeballed gems they play the eyelids to !  
Festive arrangements look through such, be sure !  
And now the tower a-top, I took for clock's  
Or bell's abode, turns out a quaint device,  
Pillared and temple-treated Belvedere —  
Pavilion safe within its railed-about 680  
Sublimity of area — whence what stretch  
Of sea and land, throughout the seasons' change,  
Must greet the solitary ! Or suppose  
— If what the husband likes, the wife likes too —  
The happy pair of students cloistered high,  
Alone in April kiss when Spring arrives !  
Or no, he mounts there by himself to meet  
Winds, welcome wafts of sea-smell, first white bird  
That flaps thus far to taste the land again,  
And all the promise of the youthful year ; 690  
Then he descends, unbosoms straight his store  
Of blessings in the bud, and both embrace,  
Husband and wife, since earth is Paradise,  
And man at peace with God. You see it all ?

Let us complete our survey, go right round  
The place : for here, it may be, we surprise  
The Priory, — these solid walls, big barns,  
Gray orchard-grounds, huge four-square stores for  
stock,  
Betoken where the Church was busy once.  
Soon must we come upon the Chapel's self. 700  
No doubt next turn will treat us to . . . Aha,  
Again our expectation proves at fault !  
Still the bright graceful modern — not to say  
Modish adornment, meets us : *Parc Anglais*,  
Tree-sprinkle, shrub-embossment as before.  
*See, the sun splits on yonder bauble world*

Of silvered glass concentrating, every side,  
 All the adjacent wonder, made minute  
 And touched grotesque by ball-convexity !  
 Just so, a sense that something is amiss, 710  
 Something is out of sorts in the display,  
 Affects us, past denial, everywhere.  
 The right erection for the Fields, the Wood,  
 (Fields — but *Elysées*, wood — but *de Boulogne*)  
 Is peradventure wrong for wood and fields  
 When Vire, not Paris, plays the Capital.

So may a good man have deficient taste ;  
 Since Son and Heir Miranda, he it was  
 Who, six years now elapsed, achieved the work  
 And truly made a wilderness to smile. 720  
 Here did their domesticity reside,  
 A happy husband and as happy wife,  
 Till . . . how can I in conscience longer keep  
 My little secret that the man is dead  
 I, for artistic purpose, talk about  
 As if he lived still? No, these two years now,  
 Has he been dead. You ought to sympathize,  
 Not mock the sturdy effort to redeem  
 My pledge, and wring you out some tragedy  
 From even such a perfect commonplace ! 730  
 Suppose I boast the death of such desert  
 My tragic bit of Red? Who contravenes  
 Assertion that a tragedy exists  
 In any stoppage of benevolence,  
 Utility, devotion above all?  
 Benevolent? There never was his like :  
 For poverty, he had an open hand  
 . . . Or stop — I use the wrong expression here  
 An open purse, then, ever at appeal ;

24 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

So that the unreflecting rather taxed 740  
 Profusion than penuriousness in alms.  
 One, in his day and generation, deemed  
 Of use to the community? I trust  
 Clairvaux thus renovated, regalized,  
 Paris expounded thus to Normandy,  
 Answers that question. Was the man devout?  
 After a life — one mere munificence  
 To Church and all things churchly, men or mice, —  
 Dying, his last bequeathment gave land, goods,  
 Cash, every stick and stiver, to the Church, 750  
 And notably to that church yonder, that  
 Beloved of his soul, La Ravissante —  
 Wherefrom, the latest of his gifts, the Stone  
 Gratefully bore me as on arrow-flash  
 To Clairvaux, as I told you.

“ Ay, to find

Your Red desiderated article,  
 Where every scratch and scrape provokes my White  
 To all the more superb a prominence!  
 Why, 't is the story served up fresh again —  
 How it befell the restive prophet old 760  
 Who came and tried to curse, but blessed the land.  
 Come, your last chance! he disinherited  
 Children: he made his widow mourn too much  
 By this endowment of the other Bride —  
 Nor understood that gold and jewelry  
 Adorn her in a figure, not a fact.  
 You make that White, I want, so very white,  
 'T is I say now — some trace of Red should be  
 Somewhere in this Miranda-sanctitude!”

Not here, at all events, sweet mocking friend! 770  
*For he was childless; and what heirs he had*

Were an uncertain sort of Cousinry  
 Scarce claiming kindred so as to withhold  
 The donor's purpose though fantastical :  
 Heirs, for that matter, wanting no increase  
 Of wealth, since rich already as himself ;  
 Heirs that had taken trouble off his hands,  
 Bought that productive goldsmith-business he,  
 With abnegation wise as rare, renounced  
 Precisely at a time of life when youth,  
 Nigh on departure, bids mid-age discard  
 Life's other loves and likings in a pack,  
 To keep, in lucre, comfort worth them all.  
 This Cousinry are they who boast the shop  
 Of " Firm-Miranda, London and New-York.""  
 Cousins are an unconscionable kind ;  
 But these — pretension surely on their part  
 To share inheritance were too absurd !

780

" Remains then, he dealt wrongly by his wife,  
 Despoiled her somehow by such testament ?"  
 Farther than ever from the mark, fair friend !  
 The man's love for his wife exceeded bounds  
 Rather than failed the limit. 'T was to live  
 Hers and hers only, to abolish earth  
 Outside — since Paris holds the pick of earth —  
 He turned his back, shut eyes, stopped ears to all  
 Delicious Paris tempts her children with,  
 And fled away to this far solitude —  
 She peopling solitude sufficiently !  
 She, partner in each heavenward flight sublime,  
 Was, with each condescension to the ground,  
 Duly associate also : hand in hand,  
 . . . Or side by side, I say by preference —  
 On every good work sidelingly they went.

790

800



26 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Hers was the instigation — none but she  
Willed that, if death should summon first her lord,  
Though she, sad relict, must drag residue  
Of days encumbered by this load of wealth —  
(Submitted to with something of a grace  
So long as her surviving vigilance 810  
Might worthily administer, convert  
Wealth to God's glory and the good of man,  
Give, as in life, so now in death, effect  
To cherished purpose) — yet she begged and prayed  
That, when no longer she could supervise  
The House, it should become a Hospital :  
For the support whereof, lands, goods and cash  
Alike will go, in happy guardianship,  
To yonder church, La Ravissante : who debt  
To God and man undoubtedly will pay. 820

“Not of the world, your heroine !”

Do you know

I saw her yesterday — set eyes upon  
The veritable personage, no dream ?  
I in the morning strolled this way, as oft,  
And stood at entry of the avenue.  
When, out from that first garden-gate, we gazed  
Upon and through, a small procession swept —  
Madame Miranda with attendants five.  
First, of herself : she wore a soft and white  
Engaging dress, with velvet stripes and squares 830  
Severely black, yet scarce discouraging :  
Fresh Paris-manufacture ! (Vire's would do ?  
I doubt it, but confess my ignorance.)  
Her figure ? somewhat small and darlinglike.  
Her face ? well, singularly colorless,  
*For first thing : which scarce suits a blonde, you know.*

Pretty you would not call her : though perhaps  
 Attaining to the ends of prettiness  
 And somewhat more, suppose enough of soul.  
 Then she is forty full : you cannot judge 840  
 What beauty was her portion at eighteen,  
 The age she married at. So, colorless  
 I stick to, and if featureless I add,  
 Your notion grows completer : for, although  
 I noticed that her nose was aquiline,  
 The whole effect amounts with me to — blank !  
 I never saw what I could less describe.  
 The eyes, for instance, unforgettable  
 Which ought to be, are out of mind as sight.

Yet is there not conceivably a face, 850  
 A set of wax-like features, blank at first,  
 Which, as you bendingly grow warm above,  
 Begins to take impressment from your breath ?  
 Which, as your will itself were plastic here  
 Nor needed exercise of handicraft,  
 From formless moulds itself to correspond  
 With all you think and feel and are — in fine  
 Grows a new revelation of yourself,  
 Who know now for the first time what you want ?  
 Here has been something that could wait awhile, 860  
 Learn your requirement, nor take shape before,  
 But, by adopting it, make palpable  
 Your right to an importance of your own,  
 Companions somehow were so slow to see !  
 — Far delicateser solace to conceit  
 Than should some absolute and final face,  
 Fit representative of soul inside,  
 Summon you to surrender — in no way  
 Your breath's impressment, nor, in stranger's guise,

28 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Yourself — or why of force to challenge you? 870  
 Why should your soul's reflection rule your soul?  
 ("You" means not you, nor me, nor any one  
 Framed, for a reason I shall keep suppressed,  
 To rather want a master than a slave :  
 The slavish still aspires to dominate !)  
 So, all I say is, that the face, to me  
 One blur of blank, might flash significance  
 To who had seen his soul reflected there  
 By that symmetric silvery phantom-like  
 Figure, with other five processional. 880  
 The first, a black-dressed matron — maybe, maid —  
 Mature, and dragonish of aspect, — marched ;  
 Then four came tripping in a joyous flock,  
 Two giant goats and two prodigious sheep  
 Pure as the arctic fox that suits the snow  
 Tripped, trotted, turned the march to merriment,  
 But ambled at their mistress' heel — for why ?  
 A rod of guidance marked the *Châtelaine*,  
 And ever and anon would sceptre wave,  
 And silky subject leave meandering. 890  
 Nay, one great naked sheep-face stopped to ask  
 Who was the stranger, snuffed inquisitive  
 My hand that made acquaintance with its nose,  
 Examined why the hand — of man at least —  
 Patted so lightly, warmly, so like life !  
 Are they such silly natures after all ?  
 And thus accompanied, the paled-off space,  
 Isleted shrubs and verdure, gained the group ;  
 Till, as I gave a furtive glance, and saw  
 Her back-hair was a block of solid gold, 900  
 The gate shut out my harmless question — Hair  
 So young and yellow, crowning sanctity,  
 And claiming solitude . . . can hair be false ?

" Shut in the hair and with it your last hope  
 Yellow might on inspection pass for Red ! —  
 Red, Red, where is the tinge of promised Red  
 In this old tale of town and country life,  
 This rise and progress of a family ?  
 First comes the bustling man of enterprise,  
 The fortune-founding father, rightly rough, 910  
 As who must grub and grab, play pioneer.  
 Then, with a light and airy step, succeeds  
 The son, surveys the fabric of his sire  
 And enters home, unsmirched from top to toe.  
 Polish and education qualify  
 Their fortunate possessor to confine  
 His occupancy to the first-floor suite  
 Rather than keep exploring needlessly  
 Where dwelt his sire content with cellarage :  
 Industry bustles underneath, no doubt, 920  
 And supervisors should not sit too close.  
 Next, rooms built, there 's the furniture to buy,  
 And what adornment like a worthy wife ?  
 In comes she like some foreign cabinet,  
 Purchased indeed, but purifying quick  
 What space receives it from all traffic-taint.  
 She tells of other habits, palace-life ;  
 Royalty may have pried into those depths  
 Of sandal-wooded drawer, and set a-creak  
 That pygmy portal pranked with lazuli. 930  
 More fit by far the ignoble we replace  
 By objects suited to such visitant  
 Than that we desecrate her dignity  
 By neighborhood of vulgar table, chair,  
 Which haply helped old age to smoke and doze.  
 The end is, an exchange of city-stir  
 And too intrusive burgess-fellowship,

30 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

For rural isolated elegance,  
 Careless simplicity, how preferable !  
 There one may fairly throw behind one's back 94c  
 The used-up worn-out Past, we want away,  
 And make a fresh beginning of stale life.  
 ' In just the place ' — does any one object ? —  
 ' Where aboriginal gentility  
 Will scout the upstart, twit him with each trick  
 Of townish trade-mark that stamps word and deed  
 And most of all resent that here town-dross  
 He daubs with money-color to deceive ! '  
 Rashly objected ! Is there not the Church  
 To intercede and bring benefic truce 95c  
 At outset ? She it is shall equalize  
 The laborers i' the vineyard, last as first.  
 Pay court to her, she stops impertinence.  
 ' Duke, once your sires crusaded it, we know :  
 Our friend the newcomer observes, no less,  
 Your chapel, rich with their emblazonry,  
 Wants roofing — might he but supply the means !  
 Marquise, you gave the honor of your name,  
 Titular patronage, abundant will  
 To what should be an Orphan Institute : 96c  
 Gave everything but funds, in brief ; and these,  
 Our friend, the lady newly resident,  
 Proposes to contribute, by your leave ! '  
 Brothers and sisters lie they in thy lap,  
 Thou none-excluding, all-collecting Church !  
 Sure, one has half a foot i' the hierarchy  
 Of birth, when ' Nay, my dear, ' laughs out the Duke,  
 ' I 'm the crown's cushion-carrier, but the crown —  
 Who gave its central glory, I or you ? '  
 When Marquise jokes ' My quest, forsooth ? Each  
 doit 97c

I scrape together goes for Peter-pence  
 To purvey bread and water in his bonds  
 For Peter's self imprisoned — Lord, how long?  
 Yours, yours alone the bounty, dear my dame,  
 You plumped the purse which, poured into the plate,  
 Made the Archbishop open brows so broad!  
 And if you really mean to give that length  
 Of lovely lace to edge the robe!' . . . Ah, friends,  
 Gem better serves so than by calling crowd  
 Round shop-front to admire the million's-worth! 980  
 Lace gets more homage than from *lorquette*-stare,  
 And comment coarse to match, (should one display  
 One's robe a trifle o'er the *baignoire*-edge,)  
 'Well may she line her slippers with the like,  
 If minded so! their shop it was produced  
 That wonderful *parure*, the other day,  
 Whereof the Baron said it beggared him.'  
 And so the paired Mirandas built their house,  
 Enjoyed their fortune, sighed for family, 989  
 Found friends would serve their purpose quite as well,  
 And come, at need, from Paris — anyhow,  
 With evident alacrity, from Vire —  
 Endeavor at the chase, at least succeed  
 In smoking, eating, drinking, laughing, and  
 Preferring country, oh so much to town!  
 Thus lived the husband; though his wife would sigh  
 In confidence, when Countesses were kind,  
 'Cut off from Paris and society!'  
 White, White, I once more round you in the ears!  
 Though you have marked it, in a corner, yours 1000  
 Henceforth, — Red-lettered 'Failure' very plain,  
 I shall acknowledge, on the snowy hem  
 Of ordinary Night-cap! Come, enough!  
 We have gone round its cotton vastitude,

32 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Or halt-round, for the end's consistent still,  
A *cul-de-sac* with stoppage at the sea.  
Here we return upon our steps. One look  
May bid good morning — properly good night —  
To civic bliss, Miranda and his mate !  
Are we to rise and go ? ”

No, sit and stay ! 1010

Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw  
Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.  
Don't the rings shriek an ominous “ Ha ! ha !  
So you take Human Nature upon trust ? ”  
List but with like trust to an incident  
Which speedily shall make quite Red enough  
Burn out of yonder spotless napery !  
Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize  
The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,  
One laugh of color and embellishment ! 1020  
Because it was there, — past those laurustines,  
On that smooth grave.-sweep 'twixt flowers and  
sward, —

There tragic death befell ; and not one grace  
Outspread before you but is registered  
In that sinistrous coil these last two years  
Were occupied in winding smooth again.

“ True ? ” Well, at least it was concluded so,  
Sworn to be truth, allowed by Law as such  
(With my concurrence, if it matter here)  
A month ago : at Vire they tried the case. 1030

II.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, then, . . . but stay !  
Permit me a preliminary word,  
*And, after, all shall go so straight to end !*

Have you, the travelled lady, found yourself  
 Inside a ruin, fane or bath or cirque,  
 Renowned in story, dear through youthful dream ?  
 If not, — imagination serves as well.  
 Try fancy-land, go back a thousand years,  
 Or forward, half the number, and confront 9  
 Some work of art gnawn hollow by Time's tooth, —  
 Hellenic temple, Roman theatre,  
 Gothic cathedral, Gallic Tuileries,  
 But ruined, one and whichso'er you like.  
 Obstructions choke what still remains intact,  
 Yet proffer change that's picturesque in turn ;  
 Since little life begins where great life ends,  
 And vegetation soon amalgamates,  
 Smooths novel shape from out the shapeless old,  
 Till broken column, battered cornice block  
 The centre with a bulk half weeds and flowers, 20  
 Half relics you devoutly recognize.  
 Devoutly recognizing, — hark, a voice  
 Not to be disregarded ! “ Man worked here  
 Once on a time ; here needs again to work ;  
 Ruins obstruct, which man must remedy.”  
 Would you demur “ Let Time fulfil his task,  
 And, till the scythe-sweep find no obstacle,  
 Let man be patient ” ?

The reply were prompt :  
 “ Glisteningly beneath the May-night moon,  
 Herbage and floral coverture bedeck 30  
 Yon splintered mass amidst the solitude :  
 Wolves occupy the background, or some snake  
 Glides by at distance ; picturesque enough !  
 Therefore, preserve it ? Nay, pour daylight in, —  
 The mound proves swarming with humanity.



#### 34 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

There never was a thorough solitude,  
Now you look nearer : mortal busy life  
First of all brought the crumbings down on pate,  
Which trip man's foot still, plague his passage much,  
And prove — what seems to you so picturesque 40  
To him is . . . but experiment yourself  
On how conducive to a happy home  
Will be the circumstance your bed for base  
Boasts tessellated pavement, — equally  
Affected by the scorpion for his nest, —  
While what o'erroofs bed is an architrave,  
Marble, and not unlikely to crush man  
To mummy, should its venerable prop,  
Some fig-tree-stump, play traitor underneath.  
Be wise ! Decide ! For conservation's sake, 50  
Clear the arena forthwith ! lest the tread  
Of too-much-tried impatience trample out  
Solid and unsubstantial to one blank  
Mud-mixture, picturesque to nobody, —  
And, task done, quarrel with the parts intact  
Whence came the filtered fine dust, whence the crash  
Bides but its time to follow. Quick conclude  
Removal, time effects so tardily,  
Of what is plain obstruction ; rubbish cleared,  
Let partial-ruin stand while ruin may, 60  
And serve world's use, since use is manifold.  
Repair wreck, stanchion wall to heart's content,  
But never think of renovation pure  
And simple, which involves creation too.  
Transform and welcome ! Yon tall tower may  
help  
(Though built to be a belfry and naught else)  
Some Father Secchi to tick Venus off  
*In transit* : never bring there bell again,

To damage him aloft, brain us below,  
When new vibrations bury both in brick ! ” 70

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, furnishing  
The application at his cost, poor soul !  
Was instanced how, — because the world lay strewn  
With ravage of opinions in his path,  
And neither he, nor any friendly wit,  
Knew and could teach him which was firm, which frail,  
In his adventure to walk straight through life  
The partial-ruin, — in such enterprise,  
He straggled into rubbish, struggled on,  
And stumbled out again observably. 80

“ Yon buttress still can back me up,” he judged :  
And at a touch down came both he and it.

“ A certain statue, I was warned against,  
Now, by good fortune, lies well under foot,  
And cannot tempt to folly any more : ”

So, liting eye, aloft since safety lay,  
What did he light on ? the Idalian shape,  
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still !

“ These steps ascend the labyrinthine stair  
Whence, darkling and on all-fours, out I stand 90  
Exalt and safe, and bid low earth adieu —  
For so instructs ‘ Advice to who would climb : ’ ”  
And all at once the climbing landed him  
— Where, is my story.

Take its moral first.

Do you advise a climber ? Have respect  
To the poor head, with more or less of brains  
To spill, should breakage follow your advice !  
Head-break to him will be heart-break to you  
For having preached “ Disturb no ruins here \

36 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Are not they crumbling of their own accord ? 100  
Meantime, let poets, painters keep a prize !  
Beside, a sage pedestrian picks his way."  
A sage pedestrian — such as you and I !  
What if there trip, in merry carelessness,  
And come to grief, a weak and foolish child ?  
Be cautious how you counsel climbing, then !

Are you adventurous and climb yourself ?  
Plant the foot warily, accept a staff,  
Stamp only where you probe the standing-point,  
Move forward, well assured that move you may : 110  
Where you mistrust advance, stop short, there stick !  
This makes advancing slow and difficult ?  
Hear what comes of the endeavor of brisk youth  
To foot it fast and easy ! Keep this same  
Notion of outside mound and inside mash,  
Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,  
Symbolic partial-ravage, — keep in mind !  
Here fortune placed his feet who first of all  
Found no incumbrance, till head found . . . But hear !  
This son and heir then of the jeweller, 120  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, at his birth,  
Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood  
With answerable gush, his mother's gift,  
Of spirit, French and critical and cold.  
Such mixture makes a battle in the brain,  
Ending as faith or doubt gets uppermost ;  
Then will has way a moment, but no more :  
So nicely-balanced are the adverse strengths,  
That victory entails reverse next time.  
The tactics of the two are different 130  
And equalize the odds : for blood comes first,  
Surrounding life with undisputed faith.

But presently, a new antagonist,  
 By scarce-suspected passage in the dark,  
 Steals spirit, fingers at each crevice found  
 Athwart faith's stronghold, fronts the astonished man :  
 "Such pains to keep me far, yet here stand I,  
 Your doubt inside the faith-defence of you !"

With faith it was friends bulwarked him about  
 From infancy to boyhood ; so, by youth, 140  
 He stood impenetrably circuited,  
 Heaven-high and low as hell : what lacked he thus,  
 Guarded against aggression, storm or sap ?  
 What foe would dare approach ? Historic Doubt ?  
 Ay, were there some half-knowledge to attack !  
 Batter doubt's best, sheer ignorance will beat.  
 Acumen metaphysic ? — drills its way  
 Through what, I wonder ! A thick feather-bed  
 Of thoughtlessness, no operating tool —  
 Framed to transpierce the flint-stone — fumbles at, 150  
 With chance of finding an impediment !  
 This Ravissante, now : when he saw the church  
 For the first time, and to his dying-day,  
 His firm belief was that the name fell fit  
 From the Delivering Virgin, niched and known ;  
 As if there wanted records to attest  
 The appellation was a pleasantry,  
 A pious rendering of Rare Vissante,  
 The proper name which erst our province bore.  
 He would have told you that Saint Aldabert 160  
 Founded the church, (Heaven early favored France,)  
 About the second century from Christ ;  
 Though the true man was Bishop of Raimbaux,  
 Eleventh in succession, Eldobert,  
 Who flourished after some six hundred years.

### 38 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

He it was brought the image "from afar,"  
(Made out of stone the place produces still)  
"Infantine Art divinely artless," (Art  
In the decrepitude of Decadence,)  
And set it up a-working miracles 170  
Until the Northmen's fury laid it low,  
Not long, however: an egregious sheep,  
Zealous with scratching hoof and routing horn,  
Unearthed the image in good Mailleville's time,  
Count of the country. "If the tale be false,  
Why stands it carved above the portal plain?"  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda used to ask.  
To Londres went the prize in solemn pomp,  
But, liking old abode and loathing new,  
Was borne — this time, by angels — back again. 180  
And, reinaugurated, miracle  
Succeeded miracle, a lengthy list,  
Until indeed the culmination came —  
Archbishop Chaumont prayed a prayer and vowed  
A vow — gained prayer and paid vow properly —  
For the conversion of Prince Vertgalant.  
These facts, sucked in along with mother's-milk,  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would dispute  
As soon as that his hands were flesh and bone,  
Milk-nourished two-and-twenty years before. 190  
So fortified by blind Castilian blood,  
What say you to the chances of French cold  
Critical spirit, should Voltaire besiege  
"Alp, Apennine, and fortified redoubt" ?  
Ay, would such spirit please to play faith's game  
Faith's way, attack where faith defends so well!  
But then it shifts, tries other strategy.  
Coldness grows warmth, the critical becomes  
*Unquestioning* acceptance. "Share and share

Alike in facts, to truth add other truth ! 200  
 Why with old truth needs new truth disagree ? ”


Thus doubt was found invading faith, this time,  
 By help of not the spirit but the flesh :  
 Fat Rabelais chuckled, where faith lay in wait  
 For lean Voltaire's grimace — French, either foe.  
 Accordingly, while round about our friend  
 Ran faith without a break which learned eye  
 Could find at two-and-twenty years of age,  
 The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep soon  
 Assured itself there spread a standing-space 210  
 Flowery and comfortable, nowise rock  
 Nor pebble-pavement roughed for champion's tread  
 Who scorns discomfort, pacing at his post.  
 Tall, long-limbed, shoulder right and shoulder left,  
 And 'twixt *acromia* such a latitude,  
 Black heaps of hair on head, and blacker bush  
 O'er-rioting chin, cheek and throat and chest, —  
 His brown meridional temperament  
 Told him — or rather pricked into his sense  
 Plainer than language — “ Pleasant station here ! 220  
 Youth, strength, and lustihood can sleep on turf  
 Yet pace the stony platform afterward :  
 First signal of a foe and up they start !  
 Saint Eldobert, at all such vanity,  
 Nay — sinfulness, had shaken head austere.  
 Had he ? But did Prince Vertgalant ? And yet,  
 After how long a slumber, of what sort,  
 Was it, he stretched octogenary joints  
 And, nigh on Day-of-Judgment trumpet-blast,  
 Jumped up and manned wall, brisk as any bee ? ” 230  
 Nor Rabelais nor Voltaire, but Sganarelle,  
 You comprehend, was pushing through the chink !

40 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

That stager in the saint's correct costume,  
Who ever has his speech in readiness  
For thickhead juvenility at fault :  
" Go pace yon platform and play sentinel !  
You won't ? The worse ! but still a worse might hap.  
Stay then, provided that you keep in sight  
The battlement, one bold leap lands you by !  
Resolve not desperately ' Wall or turf,                    240  
Choose this, choose that, but no alternative ! '  
No ! Earth left once were left for good and all :  
' With Heaven you may accommodate yourself. ' "

Saint Eldobert — I much approve his mode ;  
With sinner Vertgalant I sympathize ;  
But histrionic Sganarelle, who prompts  
While pulling back, refuses yet concedes, —  
Whether he preach in chair, or print in book,  
Or whisper due sustainment to weak flesh,                    250  
Counting his sham beads threaded on a lie —  
Surely, one should bid pack that mountebank !  
Surely, he must have momentary fits  
Of self-sufficient stage-forgetfulness,  
Escapings of the actor-lassitude  
When he allows the grace to show the grin,  
Which ought to let even thickheads recognize  
(Through all the busy and benefic part, —  
Bridge-building, or rock-riving, or good clean  
Transport of church and congregation both  
From this to that place with no harm at all,)                    260  
The Devil, that old stager, at his trick  
Of general utility, who leads  
Downward, perhaps, but fiddles all the way !

Therefore, no sooner does our candidate  
*For saintship spotlessly emerge soul-cleansed*



From First Communion to mount guard at post,  
 Paris-proof, top to toe, than up there starts  
 The Spirit of the Boulevard — you know Who —  
 With jocund “ So, a structure fixed as fate,       269  
 Faith’s tower joins on to tower, no ring more round,  
 Full fifty years at distance, too, from youth !  
 Once reach that precinct and there fight your best,  
 As looking back you wonder what has come  
 Of daisy-dappled turf you danced across !  
 Few flowers that played with youth shall pester age,  
 However age esteem the courtesy;  
 And Eldobert was something past his prime,  
 Stocked Caen with churches ere he tried hand here.  
 Saint-Sauveur, Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre, Saint-Jean  
 Attest his handiwork commenced betimes.       280  
 He probably would preach that turf is mud.  
 Suppose it mud, through mud one picks a way,  
 And when, clay-clogged, the struggler steps to stone,  
 He uncakes shoe, arrives in manlier guise  
 Than carried pick-a-back by Eldobert  
 Big-baby-fashion, lest his leathers leak !  
 All that parade about Prince Vertgalant  
 Amounts to — your Castilian helps enough —  
*Inveni ovem quæ perierat :*  
 But ask the pretty votive statue-thing       290  
 What the lost sheep’s meantime amusements were  
 Till the Archbishop found him ! That stays blank :  
 They washed the fleece well and forgot the rest.  
 Make haste, since time flies, to determine, though ! ”

Thus opportunely took up parable, —  
 Admonishing Miranda just emerged  
 Pure from The Ravissante and Paris-proof, —  
 Saint Sganarelle : then slipped aside, changed mask.



42 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

And made re-entry as a gentleman  
Born of the Boulevard, with another speech      300  
I spare you.

So, the year or two revolved,  
And ever the young man was dutiful  
To altar and to hearth : had confidence  
In the whole Ravissantish history.  
Voltaire ? Who ought to know so much of him, —  
Old sciolist, whom only boys think sage, —  
As one whose father's house upon the Quai  
Neighbored the very house where that Voltaire  
Died mad and raving, not without a burst  
Of squibs and crackers too significant ?      310  
Father and mother hailed their best of sons,  
Type of obedience, domesticity,  
Never such an example inside doors !  
Outside, as well not keep too close a watch ;  
Youth must be left to some discretion there.  
And what discretion proved, I find deposed  
At Vire, confirmed by his own words : to wit,  
How, with the sprightliness of twenty-five,  
Five — and not twenty, for he gave their names  
With laudable precision — were the few      320  
Appointed by him unto mistress-ship ;  
While, meritoriously the whole long week  
A votary of commerce only, week  
Ended, “ at shut of shop on Saturday,  
Do I, as is my wont, get drunk,” he writes  
In airy record to a confidant.  
“ Bragging and lies ! ” replied the apologist :  
“ And do I lose by that ? ” laughed Somebody  
At the Court-edge a-tiptoe, mid the crowd,  
*In his own clothes, a-listening to men's Law.*      330

Thus while, prospectively a combatant,  
 The volunteer bent brows, clenched jaws, and fierce  
 Whistled the march-tune "Warrior to the wall!"  
 Something like flowery laughters round his feet  
 Tangled him of a sudden with "Sleep first!"  
 And fairly flat upon the turf sprawled he  
 And let strange creatures make his mouth their home.  
 Anyhow, 't is the nature of the soul  
 To seek a show of durability,  
 Nor, changing, plainly be the slave of change. 340  
 Outside the turf, the towers: but, round the turf,  
 A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,  
 Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place:  
 Tent which, while screening jollity inside  
 From the external circuit — evermore  
 A menace to who lags when he should march —  
 Yet stands a-tremble, ready to collapse  
 At touch of foot: turf is acknowledged grass,  
 And grass, though pillowy, held contemptible  
 Compared with solid rock, the rampired ridge. 350  
 To truth a pretty homage thus we pay  
 By testifying — what we dally with,  
 Falsehood, (which, never fear we take for truth!)  
 We may enjoy, but then — how we despise!

Accordingly, on weighty business bound,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda stooped to play,  
 But, with experience, soon reduced the game  
 To principles, and thenceforth played by rule:  
 Rule, dignifying sport as sport, proclaimed  
 No less that sport was sport and nothing more. 360  
 He understood the worth of womankind, —  
 To furnish man — provisionally — sport:  
 Sport transitive — such earth's amusements are:

#### 44 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

But, seeing that amusements pall by use,  
Variety therein is requisite.  
And since the serious work of life were wronged  
Should we bestow importance on our play,  
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,  
Cheating is lawful chase. We have to spend  
An hour — they want a lifetime thrown away : 370  
We seek to tickle sense — they ask for soul,  
As if soul had no higher ends to serve !  
A stag-hunt gives the royal creature law,  
Bat-fowling is all fair with birds at roost,  
The lantern and the clapnet suit the hedge.  
Which must explain why, bent on Boulevard game,  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda decently  
Was prudent in his pleasure — passed himself  
Off on the fragile fair about his path  
As the gay devil rich in mere good looks, 380  
Youth, hope — what matter though the purse be void ?  
“ If I were only young Miranda, now,  
Instead of a poor clerkly drudge at desk  
All day, poor artist vainly bruising brush  
On palette, poor musician scraping gut  
With horsehair teased that no harmonics come !  
Then would I love with liberality,  
Then would I pay ! — who now shall be repaid,  
Repaid alike for present pain and past,  
If Mademoiselle permit the contre-danse, 390  
Sing ‘ Gay in garret youth at twenty lives,’  
And afterward accept a lemonade ! ”

Such sweet facilities of intercourse  
Afford the Winter-Garden and Mabilles !  
“ Oh, I unite ” — runs on the confidence,  
Poor fellow, that was read in open Court,

— “ Amusement with discretion : never fear  
 My *escapades* cost more than market-price !  
 No durably-attached Miranda-dupe,  
 Sucked dry of substance by two clinging lips, 400  
 Promising marriage, and performing it !  
 Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,  
 And know where duty takes me — in good time ! ”

Thus fortified and realistic, then,  
 At all points thus against illusion armed,  
 He wisely did New Year inaugurate  
 By playing truant to the favored five :  
 And sat installed at “ The Varieties, ” —  
 Playhouse appropriately named, — to note  
 ( Prying amid the turf that ’s flowery there ) 410  
 What primrose, firstling of the year, might push  
 The snows aside to deck his button-hole —  
 Unnoticed by that outline sad, severe,  
 ( Though fifty good long years removed from youth )  
 That tower and tower, — our image, bear in mind !

No sooner was he seated than, behold,  
 Out burst a polyanthus ! He was ’ware  
 Of a young woman niched in neighborhood ;  
 And ere one moment flitted, fast was he  
 Found captive to the beauty evermore, 420  
 For life, for death, for heaven, for hell, her own.  
 Philosophy, bewail thy fate ! Adieu,  
 Youth realistic and illusion-proof !  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — hero late  
 Who “ understood the worth of womankind, ”  
 “ Who found therein — provisionally — sport, ” —  
 Felt, in the flitting of a moment, fool  
 Was he, and folly all that seemed so wise,  
 And the best proof of wisdom’s birth would be

46 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

That he made all endeavor, body, soul, 43c  
By any means, at any sacrifice  
Of labor, wealth, repute, and (— well, the time  
For choosing between heaven on earth, and heaven  
In heaven, was not at hand immediately —)  
Made all endeavor, without loss incurred  
Of one least minute, to obtain her love.  
“ Sport transitive ? ” “ Variety required ? ”  
“ In loving were a lifetime thrown away ? ”  
How singularly may young men mistake !  
The fault must be repaired with energy. 44c

Monsieur Léonce Miranda ate her up  
With eye-devouring ; when the unconscious fair  
Passed from the close-packed hall, he pressed behind ;  
She mounted vehicle, he did the same,  
Coach stopped, and cab fast followed, at one door —  
Good house in unexceptionable street.  
Out stepped the lady, — never think, alone !  
A mother was not wanting to the maid,  
Or, may be, wife, or widow, might one say ?  
Out stepped and properly down flung himself 45c  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda at her feet —  
And never left them after, so to speak,  
For twenty years, till his last hour of life,  
When he released them, as precipitate.  
Love proffered and accepted then and there !  
Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean : this love was true,  
And the rest happened by due consequence.  
By which we are to learn that there exists  
A falsish false, for truth 's inside the same, 46c  
And truth that 's only half true, falsish truth.  
The better for both parties ! folk may taunt

That half your rock-built wall is rubble-heap :  
 Answer them, half their flowery turf is stones !  
 Our friend had hitherto been decking coat  
 If not with stones, with weeds that stones befit,  
 With dandelions — “ primrose-buds,” smirked he ;  
 This proved a polyanthus on his breast,  
 Prize-lawful or prize-lawless, flower the same.  
 So with his other instance of mistake : 470  
 Was Christianity the Ravissante ?

And what a flower of flowers he chanced on now !  
 To primrose, polyanthus I prefer  
 As illustration, from the fancy-fact  
 That out of simple came the composite  
 By culture : that the florist bedded thick  
 His primrose-root in ruddle, bullock's blood,  
 Ochre and devils'-dung, for aught I know,  
 Until the pale and pure grew fiery-fine,  
 Ruby and topaz, rightly named anew. 480  
 This lady was no product of the plain ;  
 Social manure had raised a rarity.  
 Clara de Millefleurs (note the happy name)  
 Blazed in the full-blown glory of her Spring.  
 Peerlessly perfect, form and face : for both —  
 “ Imagine what, at seventeen, may have proved  
 Miss Pages, the actress : Pages herself, my dear ! ”  
 Noble she was, the name denotes : and rich ?  
 “ The apartment in this Coliseum Street,  
 Furnished, my dear, with such an elegance, 490  
 Testifies wealth, my dear, sufficiently !  
 What quality, what style and title, eh ?  
 Well now, waive nonsense, you and I are boys  
 No longer : somewhere must a screw be slack !  
*Don't fancy, Duchesses descend at door*

48 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched,  
And bid him take heart, and deliver mind,  
March in and make himself at ease forthwith, —  
However broad his chest and black his beard,  
And comely his belongings, — all through love 500  
Protested in a world of ways save one  
Hinting at marriage !” — marriage which yet means  
Only the obvious method, easiest help  
To satisfaction of love’s first demand,  
That love endure eternally : “ my dear,  
Somewhere or other must a screw be slack !”

Truth is the proper policy : from truth —  
Whate’er the force wherewith you fling your speech, —  
Be sure that speech will lift you, by rebound,  
Somewhere above the lowness of a lie ! 510  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda heard too true  
A tale — perhaps I may subjoin, too trite !  
As the meek martyr takes her statued stand  
Above our pity, claims our worship just  
Because of what she puts in evidence,  
Signal of suffering, badge of torture borne  
In days gone by, shame then but glory now,  
Barb, in the breast, turned aureole for the front !  
So, half timidity, composure half,  
Clara de Millefleurs told her martyrdom. 520

Of poor though noble parentage, deprived  
Too early of a father’s guardianship,  
What wonder if the prodigality  
Of nature in the girl, whose mental gifts  
Matched her external dowry, form and face —  
If these suggested a too prompt resource  
To the resourceless mother ? “ Try the Stage  
*And so escape starvation ! Prejudice*

Defames Mimetic Art : be yours to prove  
 That gold and dross may meet and never mix, 530  
 Purity plunge in pitch yet soil no plume ! ”

All was prepared in London — (you conceive  
 The natural shrinking from publicity  
 In Paris, where the name excites remark)  
 London was ready for the grand *début* ;  
 When some perverse ill-fortune, incident  
 To art mimetic, some malicious thrust  
 Of Jealousy who sidles 'twixt the scenes  
 Or pops up sudden from the prompter's hole, —  
 Somehow the brilliant bubble bursts in suds. 540  
 Want followed : in a foreign land, the pair !  
 O hurry over the catastrophe —  
 Mother too sorely tempted, daughter tried  
 Scarcely so much as circumvented, say !  
 Caged unsuspecting artless innocence !

Monsieur Léonce Miranda tell the rest ! —  
 The rather that he told it in a style  
 To puzzle Court Guide students, much more me.  
 “ Brief, she became the favorite of Lord N.,  
 An aged but illustrious Duke, thereby 550  
 Breaking the heart of his competitor  
 The Prince of O. Behold her palaced straight  
 In splendor, clothed in diamonds ” (phrase how fit !),  
 “ Giving tone to the City by the Thames !  
 Lord N., the aged but illustrious Duke,  
 Was even on the point of wedding her,  
 Giving his name to her ” (why not to us ?)  
 “ But that her better angel interposed.  
 She fled from such a fate to Paris back,  
 A fortnight since : conceive Lord N.'s despair ! 560



50 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Duke as he is, there 's no invading France.  
 He must restrict pursuit to postal plague  
 Of writing letters daily, duly read  
 As darlingly she hands them to myself,  
 The privileged supplanter, who therewith  
 Light a cigar and see abundant blue " —  
 (Either of heaven or else Havanna-smoke.)  
 "Think! she, who helped herself to diamonds late,  
 In passion of disinterestedness  
 Now — will accept no tribute of my love 570  
 Beyond a paltry ring, three Louis'-worth!  
 Little she knows I have the rummaging  
 Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme!"  
 So wrote entrancedly to confidant  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda. Surely now,  
 If Heaven, that sees all, understands no less,  
 It finds temptation pardonable here,  
 It mitigates the promised punishment,  
 It recognizes that to tarry just  
 An April hour amid such dainty turf 580  
 Means no rebellion against task imposed  
 Of journey to the distant wall one day?  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda puts the case!  
 Love, he is purposed to renounce, abjure;  
 But meanwhile, is the case a common one?  
 Is it the vulgar sin, none hates as he?  
 Which question, put directly to "his dear"  
 (His brother — I will tell you in a trice)  
 Was doubtless meant, by due meandering,  
 To reach, to fall not unobserved before 590  
 The auditory cavern 'neath the cope  
 Of Her, the placable, the Ravissante.  
 But here 's the drawback, that the image smiles,  
 Smiles on, smiles ever, says to supplicant

" Ay, ay, ay " — like some kindly weathercock  
 Which, stuck fast at Set Fair, Favonian Breeze,  
 Still warrants you from rain, though Auster's lead  
 Bring down the sky above your cloakless mirth.  
 Had he proposed this question to, nor " dear " 600  
 Nor Ravissante, but prompt to the Police,  
 The Commissary of his Quarter, now —  
 There had been shaggy eyebrows elevate  
 With twinkling apprehension in each orb  
 Beneath, and when the sudden shut of mouth  
 Relaxed, — lip pressing lip, lest out should plump  
 The pride of knowledge in too frank a flow, —  
 Then, fact on fact forthcoming, dose were dealt  
 Of truth remedial in sufficiency  
 To save a chicken threatened with the pip,  
 Head-staggers and a tumble from its perch. 610

Alack, it was the lady's self that made  
 The revelation, after certain days  
 — Nor so unwisely ! As the haschisch-man  
 Prepares a novice to receive his drug,  
 Adroitly hides the soil with sudden spread  
 Of carpet ere he seats his customer :  
 Then shows him how to smoke himself about  
 With Paradise ; and only when, at puff  
 Of pipe, the Houri dances round the brain  
 Of dreamer, does he judge no need is now 620  
 For circumspection and punctiliousness ;  
 He may resume the serviceable scrap  
 That made the votary unaware of muck.  
 Just thus the lady, when her brewage — love —  
 Was well a-fume about the novice-brain,  
 Saw she might boldly pluck from underneath  
 Her lover the preliminary lie.

52 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Clara de Millefleurs, of the noble race,  
 Was Lucie Steiner, child to Dominique  
 And Magdalen Commercy; born at Sierck, 63c  
 About the bottom of the Social Couch.  
 The father having come and gone again,  
 The mother and the daughter found their way  
 To Paris, and professed mode-merchandise,  
 Were milliners, we English roughlier say;  
 And soon a fellow-lodger in the house,  
 Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, young and smart,  
 Tailor by trade, perceived his housemate's youth,  
 Smartness, and beauty over and above.  
 Courtship was brief, and marriage followed quick, 64c  
 And quicker — impecuniosity.  
 The young pair quitted Paris to reside  
 At London: which repaid the compliment  
 But scurvily, since not a whit the more  
 Trade prospered by the Thames than by the Seine.  
 Failing all other, as a last resource,  
 "He would have trafficked in his wife," — she said.  
 If for that cause they quarrelled, 't was, I fear,  
 Rather from reclamation of her rights  
 To wifely independence, than as wronged 65c  
 Otherwise by the course of life proposed:  
 Since, on escape to Paris back again  
 From horror and the husband, — ill-exchanged  
 For safe maternal home recovered thus, —  
 I find her domiciled and dominant  
 In that apartment, Coliseum Street,  
 Where all the splendid magic met and mazed  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda's venturous eye.  
 Only, the same was furnished at the cost  
 Of some one notable in days long since, 66c  
*Carlino Centofanti*: he it was

Found entertaining unawares — if not  
 An angel, yet a youth in search of one.  
 Why this revelation after reticence?  
 Wherefore, beginning “Millefleurs,” end at all  
 Steiner, Muhlhausen, and the ugly 1est?  
 Because the unsocial purse-comptrolling wight,  
 Carlino Centofanti, — made aware  
 By misadventure that his bounty, crumbs  
 From table, comforted a visitant, —  
 Took churlish leave, and left, too, debts to pay.  
 Loaded with debts, the lady needs must bring  
 Her soul to bear assistance from a friend  
 Beside that paltry ring, three Louis’-worth;  
 And therefore might the little circumstance  
 That Monsieur Léonce had the rummaging  
 Of old Papa’s shop in the Place Vendôme  
 Pass, perhaps, not so unobservably.

670

Frail shadow of a woman in the flesh,  
 These very eyes of mine saw yesterday,  
 Would I re-tell this story of your woes,  
 Would I have heart to do you detriment  
 By pinning all this shame and sorrow plain  
 To that poor *chignon*, — staying with me still,  
 Though form and face have well-nigh faded now, —  
 But that men read it, rough in brutal print,  
 As two years since some functionary’s voice  
 Rattled all this — and more by very much —  
 Into the ear of vulgar Court and crowd?  
 Whence, by reverberation, rumblings grew  
 To what had proved a week-long roar in France,  
 Had not the dreadful cannonry drowned all.  
 Was, now, the answer of your advocate  
 More than just this? “The shame fell long ago,

680

690

54 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

The sorrow keeps increasing : God forbid  
We judge man by the faults of youth in age ! ”  
Permit me the expression of a hope  
Your youth proceeded like your avenue,  
Stepping by bush, and tree, and taller tree,  
Until, columnar, at the house they end. 700  
So might your creeping youth columnar rise  
And reach, by year and year, symmetrical,  
To where all shade stops short, shade’s service done.  
Bushes on either side, and boughs above,  
Darken, deform the path else sun would streak ;  
And, cornered half-way somewhere, I suspect  
Stagnation and a horse-pond : hurry past !  
For here ’s the house, the happy half-and-half  
Existence — such as stands for happiness  
True and entire, howe’er the squeamish talk ! 710  
Twenty years long, you may have loved this man ;  
He must have loved you ; that ’s a pleasant life,  
Whatever was your right to lead the same.  
The white domestic pigeon pairs secure,  
Nay, does mere duty by bestowing egg  
In authorized compartment, warm and safe,  
Boarding about, and gilded spire above,  
Hoisted on pole, to dogs’ and cats’ despair !  
But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs  
On tree-top, every straw a thievery, 720  
Where the wild dove — despite the fowler’s snare,  
The sportsman’s shot, the urchin’s stone, — crooned  
gay,  
And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,  
Nor minded a malignant world below.  
I throw first stone forsooth ? ’T is mere assault  
Of playful sugarplum against your cheek,  
Which, if it makes cheek tingle, wipes off rouge !

*You*, my worst woman? Ah, that touches pride,  
 Puts on his mettle the exhibitor 729  
 Of Night-caps, if you taunt him " This, no doubt, —  
 Now we have got to Female-garniture, —  
 Crowns your collection, Reddest of the row ! "   
 O unimaginative ignorance  
 Of what dye's depth keeps best apart from worst  
 In womankind ! — how heaven's own pure may seem  
 To blush aurorally beside such blanched  
 Divineness as the women-wreaths named White :  
 While hell, eruptive and fuliginous,  
 Sickens to very pallor as I point  
 Her place to a Red clout called woman too ! 740  
 Hail, heads that ever had such glory once  
 Touch you a moment, like God's cloven tongues  
 Of fire ! your lambent aureoles lost may leave  
 You marked yet, dear beyond true diadems :  
 And hold, each foot, nor spurn, to man's disgrace,  
 What other twist of fetid rag may fall !  
 Let slink into the sewer the cupping-cloth !

Lucie, much solaced, I re-finger you,  
 The medium article ; if ruddy-marked  
 With iron-mould, your cambric, — clean at least 750  
 From poison-speck of rot and purulence.  
 Lucie Muhlhausen said — " Such thing am I :  
 Love me, or love me not ! " Miranda said  
 " I do love, more than ever, most for this. "   
 The revelation of the very truth  
 Proved the concluding necessary shake  
 Which bids the tardy mixture crystallize  
 Or else stay ever liquid : shoot up shaft,  
 Durably diamond, or evaporate —  
 Sluggish solution through a minute's slip. 760

56 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

Monsieur Léonce Miranda took his soul  
 In both his hands, as if it were a vase,  
 To see what came of the convulsion there,  
 And found, amid subsidence, love new-born  
 So sparkingly resplendent, old was new.  
 "Whatever be my lady's present, past,  
 Or future, this is certain of my soul,  
 I love her : in despite of all I know,  
 Defiance of the much I have to fear,  
 I venture happiness on what I hope, 77c  
 And love her from this day for evermore :  
 No prejudice to old profound respect  
 For certain Powers ! I trust they bear in mind  
 A most peculiar case, and straighten out  
 What 's crooked there, before we close accounts.  
 Renounce the world for them — some day I will :  
 Meantime, to me let her become the world !"

Thus mutely might our friend soliloquize  
 Over the tradesmen's bills, his Clara's gift —  
 In the apartment, Coliseum Street, 78c  
 Carlino Centofanti's legacy,  
 Provided rent and taxes were discharged —  
 In face of Steiner now, De Millefleurs once,  
 The tailor's wife and runaway confessed.

On such a lady if election light,  
 (According to a social prejudice)  
 If henceforth "all the world" she constitute  
 For any lover, — needs must he renounce  
 Our world in ordinary, walked about  
 By couples loving as its laws prescribe, — 79c  
 Renunciation sometimes difficult.  
 But, in this instance, time and place and thing  
 Combined to simplify experiment,

And make Miranda, in the current phrase,  
Master the situation passably.

For first facility, his brother died —  
Who was, I should have told you, confidant,  
Adviser, referee and substitute,

All from a distance : but I knew how soon  
This younger brother, lost in Portugal,  
Had to depart and leave our friend at large.

800

Cut off abruptly from companionship  
With brother-soul of bulk about as big,  
(Obvious recipient — by intelligence  
And sympathy, poor little pair of souls —  
Of much affection and some foolishness)

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, meant to lean  
By nature, needs must shift the leaning-place  
To his love's bosom from his brother's neck,  
Or fall flat unrelieved of freight sublime.

810

Next died the lord of the Aladdin's cave,  
Master o' the mint and keeper of the keys  
Of chests chokeful with gold and silver changed  
By Art to forms where wealth forgot itself,  
And caskets where reposed each pullet-egg  
Of diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants.

In short, the father of the family  
Took his departure also from our scene,  
Leaving a fat succession to his heir

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — “fortunate  
If ever man was, in a father's death,”

820

(So commented the world, — not he, too kind,  
Could that be, rather than scarce kind enough)  
Indisputably fortunate so far,

That little of incumbrance in his path,  
Which money kicks aside, would lie there long.



And finally, a rough but wholesome shock,  
 An accident which comes to kill or cure,  
 A jerk which mends a dislocated joint !  
 Such happy chance, at cost of twinge, no doubt, 830  
 Into the socket back again put truth,  
 And stopped the limb from longer dragging lie.  
 For love suggested " Better shamle on,  
 And bear your lameness with what grace you may !"  
 And but for this rude wholesome accident,  
 Continuance of disguise and subterfuge,  
 Retention of first falsehood as to name  
 And nature in the lady, might have proved  
 'Too necessary for abandonment.  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably 840  
 Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,  
 So politic, so self-preservative,  
 'Therefore so pardonable — though so wrong !  
 For see the bugbear in the background ! Breathe  
 But ugly name, and wind is sure to waft  
 'The husband news of the wife's whereabouts :  
 From where he lies perdue in London town,  
 Forth steps the needy tailor on the stage,  
 Deity-like from dusk machine of fog,  
 And claims his consort, or his consort's worth 850  
 In rubies which her price is far above.  
 Hard to propitiate, harder to oppose. —  
 Who but the man's self came to banish fear,  
 A pleasant apparition, such as shocks  
 A moment, tells a tale, then goes for good !

Monsieur Ulysse Mathiasen proved no less  
 Nor more than " Gascon." Being opposite  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda's diamond-cave  
 And robe-garment, and having little chance

Save that its gnome would keep the captive safe, 860  
 Never return his Clara to his arms.  
 For why? He was become the man in vogue,  
 The indispensable to who went clothed  
 Nor cared encounter Paris-fashion's blame, —  
 Such miracle could London absence work.  
 Rolling in riches — so translate "the vogue" —  
 Rather his object was to keep off claw  
 Should griffin scent the gold, should wife lay claim  
 To lawful portion at a future day,  
 Than tempt his partner from her private spoils. 870  
 Best forage each for each, nor coupled hunt!

Pursuantly, one morning, — knock at door  
 With knuckle, dry authoritative cough,  
 And easy stamp of foot, broke startlingly  
 On household slumber, Coliseum Street :  
 "Admittance in the name of Law!" In marched  
 The Commissary and subordinate.  
 One glance sufficed them. "A marital pair :  
 We certify, and bid good morning, sir!  
 Madame, a thousand pardons." Whereupon 880  
 Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, otherwise  
 Called "Gustave" for conveniency of trade,  
 Depositing in due form complaint of wrong,  
 Made his demand of remedy — divorce  
 From bed, board, share of name, and part in goods.  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda owned his fault,  
 Protested his pure ignorance, from first  
 To last, of rights infringed in "Gustave's" case :  
 Submitted him to judgment. Law decreed  
 "Body and goods be henceforth separate!" 890  
 And thereupon each party took its way,  
 This right, this left, rejoicing, to abide

60 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

Estranged yet amicable, opposites  
In life as in respective dwelling-place.  
Still does one read on his establishment  
Huge-lettered "Gustave," — gold out-glittering  
"Miranda, goldsmith," just across the street —  
"A first-rate hand at riding-habits" — say  
The instructed — "special cut of chamber-robcs."

Thus by a rude in seeming — rightlier judged 900  
Beneficent surprise, publicity  
Stopped further fear and trembling, and what tale  
Cowardice thinks a covert : one bold splash  
Into the mid-shame, and the shiver ends,  
Though cramp and drowning may begin perhaps.

To cite just one more point which crowned success :  
Madame, Miranda's mother, most of all  
An obstacle to his projected life  
In license, as a daughter of the Church,  
Duteous, exemplary, severe by right — 910  
Moreover one most thoroughly beloved  
Without a rival till the other sort  
Possessed her son, — first storm of anger spent,  
She seemed, though grumblingly and grudgingly,  
To let be what needs must be, acquiesce.  
"With Heaven — accommodation possible !"  
Saint Sganarelle had preached with such effect,  
She saw now mitigating circumstance.  
"The erring one was most unfortunate,  
No question : but worse Magdalens repent. 920  
Were Clara free, did only Law allow,  
What fitter choice in marriage could have made  
Léonce or anybody ?" 'T is alleged  
And evidenced, I find, by advocate

" Never did she consider such a tie  
 As baleful, springe to snap whate'er the cost."  
 And when the couple were in safety once  
 At Clairvaux, motherly, considerate,  
 She shrank not from advice. " Since safe you be,  
 Safely abide ! for winter, I know well, 930  
 Is troublesome in a cold country-house.  
 I recommend the south room, that we styled,  
 Your sire and I, the winter-chamber."

## Chance

Or purpose, — who can read the mystery ? —  
 Combined, I say, to bid " Entrench yourself,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, on this turf,  
 About this flower, so firmly that, as tent  
 Rises on every side around you both,  
 The question shall become, — Which arrogates  
 Stability, this tent or those far towers ? 940  
 May not the temporary structure suit  
 The stable circuit, co-exist in peace ? —  
 Always until the proper time, no fear !  
 ' Lay flat your tent ! ' is easier said than done."

So, with the best of auspices, betook  
 Themselves Léonce Miranda and his bride —  
 Provisionary — to their Clairvaux house,  
 Never to leave it — till the proper time.

I told you what was Clairvaux-Priory  
 Ere the improper time : an old demesne 950  
 With memories, — relic half, and ruin whole, —  
 The very place, then, to repair the wits  
 Worn out with Paris-traffic, when its lord,  
 Miranda's father, took his month of ease  
 Purchased by industry. What contrast here !

62 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Repose, and solitude, and healthy ways.  
That ticking at the back of head, he took  
For motion of an inmate, stopped at once,  
Proved nothing but the pavement's rattle left  
Behind at Paris : here was holiday. 960  
Welcome the quaint succeeding to the spruce,  
The large and lumbersome and — might he breathe  
In whisper to his own ear — dignified  
And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep !  
Palatial gloomy chambers for parade,  
And passage-lengths of lost significance,  
Never constructed as receptacle,  
At his odd hours, for him their actual lord  
By dint of diamond-dealing, goldsmithry.  
Therefore Miranda's father chopped and changed 970  
Nor roof-tile nor yet floor-brick, undismayed  
By rains a-top or rats at bottom there.  
Such contrast is so piquant for a month !  
But now arrived quite other occupants  
Whose cry was "Permanency, — life and death  
Here, here, not elsewhere, change is all we dread !"  
Their dwelling-place must be adapted, then,  
To inmates, no mere truants from the town,  
No temporary sojourners, forsooth,  
At Clairvaux : change it into Paradise ! 980

Fair friend, — who listen and let talk, alas ! —  
You would, in even such a state of things,  
Pronounce, — or am I wrong ? — for bidding stay  
The old-world inconvenience, fresh as found.  
All folk of individuality  
Prefer to be reminded now and then,  
Though at the cost of vulgar cosiness,  
That the shell-outside only harbors man

The vital and progressive, meant to build,  
 When build he may, with quite a difference, 990  
 Some time, in that far land we dream about,  
 Where every man is his own architect.  
 But then the couple here in question, each  
 At one in project for a happy life,  
 Were by no acceptance of the word  
 So individual that they must aspire  
 To architecture all-appropriate  
 And, therefore, in this world impossible :  
 They needed house to suit the circumstance,  
 Proprietors, not tenants for a term. 1000  
 Despite a certain marking, here and there,  
 Of fleecy black or white distinguishment,  
 These vulgar sheep wore the flock's uniform.  
*They* love the country, *they* renounce the town ?  
 They gave a kick, as our Italians say,  
 To Paris ere it turned and kicked themselves !  
 Acquaintances might prove too hard to seek,  
 Or the reverse of hard to find, perchance,  
 Since Monsieur Gustave's apparition there.  
 And let me call remark upon the list 1010  
 Of notabilities invoked, in Court  
 At Vire, to witness, by their phrases culled  
 From correspondence, what was the esteem  
 Of those we pay respect to, for " the pair  
 Whereof they knew the inner life," 't is said.  
 Three, and three only, answered the appeal.  
 First, Monsieur Vaillant, music-publisher,  
 " Begs Madame will accept civilities."  
 Next, Alexandre Dumas, — sire, not son, —  
 " Sends compliments to Madame and to you." 1020  
 And last — but now prepare for England's voice !  
 I will not *mar* nor make — here's word for word —

64 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

“ A rich proprietor of Paris, he  
To whom belonged that beauteous *Bagatelle*  
Close to the wood of Boulogne, Hertford high,  
Assures of homages and compliments  
Affectionate ” — not now Miranda but  
“ Madame Muhlhausen.” (Was this friend, the Duke  
Redoubtable in rivalry before ?)  
Such was the evidence when evidence 1030  
Was wanted, then if ever, to the worth  
Whereat acquaintances in Paris prized  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda’s household charm.  
No wonder, then, his impulse was to live,  
In Norman solitude, the Paris life :  
Surround himself with Art transported thence,  
And nature like those famed Elysian Fields :  
Then, warm up the right color out of both,  
By Boulevard friendships tempted to come taste  
How Paris lived again in little there. 1040

Monsieur Léonce Miranda practised Art.  
Do let a man for once live as man likes !  
Politics ? Spend your life, to spare the world’s :  
Improve each unit by some particle  
Of joy the more, deteriorate the orb  
Entire, your own : poor profit, dismal loss !  
Write books, paint pictures, or make music — since  
Your nature leans to such life-exercise !  
Ay, but such exercise begins too soon,  
Concludes too late, demands life whole and sole 1050  
Artistry being battle with the age  
It lives in ! Half life, — silence, while you learn  
What has been done ; the other half, — attempt  
At speech, amid world’s wail of wonderment —  
“ *Here’s something done was never done before !* ”

To be the very breath that moves the age  
 Means not to have breath drive you bubble-like  
 Before it — but yourself to blow : that 's strain ;  
 Strain 's worry through the life-time, till there 's peace ;  
 We know where peace expects the artist-soul. 1060

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much.  
 Therefore in Art he nowise cared to be  
 Creative ; but creation, that had birth  
 In storminess long years before was born  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, — Art, enjoyed  
 Like fleshly objects of the chase that tempt  
 In cookery, not in capture — these might feast  
 The dilettante, furnish tavern-fare  
 Open to all with purses open too.

To sit free and take tribute *seigneur*-like — 1070  
 Now, not too lavish of acknowledgment,  
 Now, self-indulgently profuse of pay,  
 Always Art's *seigneur*, not Art's serving-man  
 Whate'er the style and title and degree, —  
 That is the quiet life and easy death  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda would approve  
 Wholly — provided (back I go again  
 To the first simile) that while glasses clink,  
 And viands steam, and banqueting laughs high,  
 All that 's outside the temporary tent, 1080  
 The dim grim outline of the circuit-wall,  
 Forgets to menace " Soon or late will drop  
 Pavilion, soon or late you needs must march,  
 And laggards will be sorry they were slack !  
 Always — unless excuse sound plausible ! "

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much :  
 Whence his determination just to paint



66 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

So creditably as might help the eye  
 To comprehend how painter's eye grew dim  
 Ere it produced L'Ingegno's piece of work — 1090  
 So to become musician that his ear  
 Should judge, by its own tickling and turmoil,  
 Who made the Solemn Mass might well die deaf —  
 So cultivate a literary knack  
 That, by experience how it wiles the time,  
 He might imagine how a poet, rapt  
 In rhyming wholly, grew so poor at last  
 By carelessness about his banker's-book,  
 That the Sieur Boileau (to provoke our smile)  
 Began abruptly, — when he paid devoir 1100  
 To Louis Quatorze as he dined in state, —  
 “Sire, send a drop of broth to Pierre Corneille  
 Now dying and in want of sustenance!”  
 — I say, these half-hour playings at life's toil,  
 Diversified by billiards, riding, sport —  
 With now and then a visitor — Dumas,  
 Hertford — to check no aspiration's flight —  
 While Clara, like a diamond in the dark,  
 Should extract shining from what else were shade,  
 And multiply chance rays a million-fold, — 1110  
 How could he doubt that all offence outside, —  
 Wrong to the towers, which, pillowed on the turf,  
 He thus shut eyes to, — were as good as gone?

So, down went Clairvaux-Priory to dust,  
 And up there rose, in lieu, yon structure gay  
 Above the Norman ghosts: and where the stretch  
 Of barren country girdled house about,  
 Behold the Park, the English preference!  
 Thus made undoubtedly a desert smile  
*Monsieur Léonce Miranda.*

Ay, but she ? 1120

One should not so merge soul in soul, you think ?  
 And I think : only, let us wait, nor want  
 Two things at once — her turn will come in time.  
 A cork-float danced upon the tide, we saw,  
 This morning, blinding-bright with briny dews :  
 There was no disengaging soaked from sound,  
 Earth-product from the sister-element.  
 But when we turn, the tide will turn, I think,  
 And bare on beach will lie exposed the buoy :  
 A very proper time to try, with foot 1130  
 And even finger, which was buoying wave,  
 Which merely buoyant substance, — power to lift,  
 And power to be sent skyward passively.  
 Meanwhile, no separation of the pair !

### III.

And so slept pleasantly away five years  
 Of Paradisiac dream ; till, as there flit  
 Premonitory symptoms, pricks of pain,  
 Because the dreamer has to start awake  
 And find disease dwelt active all the while  
 In head or stomach through his night-long sleep, —  
 So happened here disturbance to content.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's last of cares,  
 Ere he composed himself, had been to make  
 Provision that, while sleeping safe he lay, 10  
 Somebody else should, dragon-like, let fall  
 Never a lid, coiled round the apple-stem,  
 But watch the precious fruitage. Somebody  
 Kept shop, in short, played Paris-substitute.  
 Himself, shrewd, well-trained, early-exercised,  
 Could take in, at an eye-glance, luck or loss —

68 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Know commerce throve, though lazily uplift  
On elbow merely : leave his bed, forsooth ?  
Such active service was the substitute's.

But one October morning, at first drop 20  
Of appled gold, first summons to be grave  
Because rough Autumn's play turns earnest now,  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda was required  
In Paris to take counsel, face to face,  
With Madame-mother : and be rated, too,  
Roundly at certain items of expense  
Whereat the government provisional,  
The Paris substitute and shopkeeper,  
Shook head, and talked of funds inadequate :  
Oh, in the long run, — not if remedy 30  
Occurred betimes ! Else, — tap the generous bole  
Too near the quick, — it withers to the root—  
Leafy, prolific, golden apple-tree,  
“ Miranda,” sturdy in the Place Vendôme !

“ What is this reckless life you lead ? ” began  
Her greeting she whom most he feared and loved,  
Madame Miranda. “ Luxury, extravagance  
Sardanapalus' self might emulate, —  
Did your good father's money go for this ?  
Where are the fruits of education, where 40  
The morals which at first distinguished you,  
The faith which promised to adorn your age ?  
And why such wastefulness outbreaking now,  
When heretofore you loved economy ?  
Explain this pulling-down and building-up  
Poor Clairvaux, which your father bought because  
Clairvaux he found it, and so left to you,  
Not a gilt-gingerbread big baby-house !  
True, we could somehow shake head and shut eye

To what was past prevention on our part — 50  
 This reprehensible illicit bond :  
 We, in a manner, winking, watched consort  
 Our modest well-conducted pious son  
 With Dalilah : we thought the smoking flax  
 Would smoulder soon away and end in snuff.  
 Is spark to strengthen, prove consuming fire ?  
 No lawful family calls Clairvaux ' home ' —  
 Why play that fool of Scripture whom the voice  
 Admonished ' Whose to-night shall be those things  
 Provided for thy morning jollity ? ' 60  
 To take one specimen of pure caprice  
 Out of the heap conspicuous in the plan, —  
 Puzzle of change, I call it, — titled big  
 ' Clairvaux Restored : ' what means this Belvedere ?  
 This Tower, stuck like a fool's-cap on the roof —  
 Do you intend to soar to heaven from thence ?  
 Tower, truly ! Better had you planted turf —  
 More fitly would you dig yourself a hole  
 Beneath it for the final journey's help !  
 O we poor parents — could we prophesy ! " 70  
 Léonce was found affectionate enough  
 To man, to woman, child, bird, beast, alike ;  
 But all affection, all one fire of heart  
 Flaming toward Madame-mother. Had she posed  
 The question plainly at the outset " Choose !  
 Cut clean in half your all-the-world of love,  
 The mother and the mistress : then resolve,  
 Take me or take her, throw away the one ! " —  
 He might have made the choice and marred my tale.  
 But, much I apprehend, the problem put 80  
 Was " Keep both halves, yet do no detriment  
 To either ! Prize each opposite in turn ! "  
 Hence, *while he prized* at worth the Clairvaux-life

70 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

With all its tolerated naughtiness,  
 He, visiting in fancy Quai Rousseau,  
 Saw, cornered in the cosiest nook of all  
 That range of rooms through number Thirty-three,  
 The lady-mother bent o'er her *bézique* ;  
 While Monsieur Curé This, and Sister That —  
 Superior of no matter what good House — 90  
 Did duty for Duke Hertford and Dumas,  
 Nay — at his mother's age — for Clara's self.  
 At Quai Rousseau, things comfortable thus,  
 Why should poor Clairvaux prove so troublesome ?  
 She played at cards, he built a Belvedere.  
 But here 's the difference : she had reached the Towers  
 And there took pastime : he was still on Turf —  
 Though fully minded that, when once he marched,  
 No sportive fancy should distract him more.

In brief, the man was angry with himself, 100  
 With her, with all the world and much beside :  
 And so the unseemly words were interchanged  
 Which crystallize what else evaporates,  
 And make mere misty petulance grow hard  
 And sharp inside each softness, heart and soul.  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda flung at last  
 Out of doors, fever-flushed : and there the Seine  
 Rolled at his feet, obsequious remedy  
 For fever, in a cold Autumnal flow.  
 "Go and be rid of memory in a bath !" 110  
 Craftily whispered Who besets the ear  
 On such occasions.

Done as soon as dreamed.  
 Back shivers poor Léonce to bed — where else ?  
 And there he lies a month 'twixt life and death,  
 Raving. "Remorse of conscience !" friends opine.

"Sirs, it may partly prove so," represents  
 Beaumont — (the family physician, he  
 Whom last year's Commune murdered, do you mind?)  
 Beaumont reports "There is some active cause,  
 More than mere pungency of quarrel past, — 120  
 Cause that keeps adding other food to fire.  
 I hear the words and know the signs, I say!  
 Dear Madame, you have read the Book of Saints,  
 How Antony was tempted? As for me,  
 Poor heathen, 't is by pictures I am taught.  
 I say then, I see standing here, — between  
 Me and my patient, and that crucifix  
 You very properly would interpose, —  
 A certain woman-shape, one white appeal  
 'Will you leave me, then, me, me, me for her?' 130  
 Since cold Seine could not quench this flame, since flare  
 Of fever does not redden it away, —  
 Be rational, indulgent, mute — should chance  
 Come to the rescue — Providence, I mean —  
 'The while I blister and phlebotomize!"

Well, somehow rescued by whatever power,  
 At month's end, back again conveyed himself  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags,  
 Nay, tinder: stuff irreparably spoiled, 139  
 Though kindly hand should stitch and patch its best.  
 Clairvaux in Autumn is restorative.  
 A friend stitched on, patched ever. All the same,  
 Clairvaux looked grayer than a month ago.  
 Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified  
 Each copse, so wealthy once; the garden-plots,  
 The orchard-walks showed dearth and dreariness.  
 The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud  
 Into a leaden wedge; and sorrowful

72 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.  
Nobody came so far from Paris now : 150  
Friends did their duty by an invalid  
Whose convalescence claimed entire repose.  
Only a single ministrant was stanch  
At quiet reparation of the stuff —  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags :  
But she was Clara and the world beside.

Another month, the year packed up his plagues  
And sullenly departed, peddler-like,  
As apprehensive old-world ware might show  
To disadvantage when the new-comer, 160  
Merchant of novelties, young 'Sixty-eight,  
With brand-new bargains, whistled o'er the lea.  
Things brightened somewhat o'er the Christmas hearth,  
As Clara plied assiduously her task.

“ Words are but words and wind. Why let the wind  
Sing in your ear, bite, sounding, to your brain ?  
Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course !  
Age quarrels because spring puts forth a leaf  
While winter has a mind that boughs stay bare ;  
Or rather — worse than quarrel — age descries 170  
Propriety in preaching life to death.  
' Enjoy nor youth, nor Clairvaux, nor poor me ?'  
Dear Madame, you enjoy your age, 't is thought !  
Your number Thirty-three on Quai Rousseau  
Cost fifty times the price of Clairvaux, tipped  
Even with our prodigious Belvedere ;  
You entertain the Curé, — we, Dumas :  
We play charades, while you prefer *bézique* :  
Do lead your own life and let ours alone ! 179  
Cross Old Year shall have done his worst, my friend !

Here comes gay New Year with a gift, no doubt.  
 Look up and let in light that longs to shine —  
 One flash of light, and where will darkness hide ?  
 Your cold makes me too cold, love ! Keep me warm !”

Whereat Léonce Miranda raised his head  
 From his two white thin hands, and forced a smile,  
 And spoke : “ I do look up, and see your light  
 Above me ! Let New Year contribute warmth —  
 I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze.”  
 Nor did he. Three days after, just a spark 190  
 From Paris, answered by a snap at Caen  
 Or whither reached the telegraphic wire :  
 “ Quickly to Paris ! On arrival, learn  
 Why you are wanted !” Curt and critical !

Off starts Léonce, one fear from head to foot ;  
 Caen, Rouen, Paris, as the railway helps ;  
 Then come the Quai and Number Thirty-three.  
 “ What is the matter, concierge ? ” — a grimace !  
 He mounts the staircase, makes for the main seat  
 Of dreadful mystery which draws him there — 200  
 Bursts in upon a bedroom known too well —  
 There lies all left now of the mother once.  
 Tapers define the stretch of rigid white,  
 Nor want there ghastly velvets of the grave.  
 A blackness sits on either side at watch,  
 Sisters, good souls but frightful all the same,  
 Silent : a priest is spokesman for his corpse.  
 “ Dead, through Léonce Miranda ! stricken down  
 Without a minute’s warning, yesterday !  
 What did she say to you, and you to her, 210  
 Two months ago ? This is the consequence !  
 The doctors have their name for the disease ;



74 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

I, you, and God say — heart-break, nothing more ! ”  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, like a stone  
 Fell at the bedfoot and found respite so,  
 While the priest went to tell the company.  
 What follows you are free to disbelieve.  
 It may be true or false that this good priest  
 Had taken his instructions, — who shall blame ? —  
 From quite another quarter than, perchance,       220  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda might suppose  
 Would offer solace in such pressing need.  
 All he remembered of his kith and kin  
 Was they were worthily his substitutes  
 In commerce, did their work and drew their pay.  
 But *they* remembered, in addition, this —  
 They fairly might expect inheritance,  
 As nearest kin, called Family by law  
 And gospel both. Now, since Miranda’s life  
 Showed nothing like abatement of distaste       230  
 For conjugality, but preference  
 Continued and confirmed of that smooth chain  
 Which slips and leaves no knot behind, no heir —  
 Presumption was, the man, become mature,  
 Would at a calculable day discard  
 His old and outworn . . . what we blush to name,  
 And make society the just amends ;  
 Scarce by a new attachment — Heaven forbid !  
 Still less by lawful marriage : that’s reserved  
 For those who make a proper choice at first —       240  
 Not try both courses and would grasp in age  
 The very treasure youth preferred to spurn.  
 No ! putting decently such thought aside,  
 The penitent must rather give his powers  
 To such a reparation of the past  
 As, edifying kindred, makes them rich.

Now, how would it enrich prospectively  
 The Cousins, if he lavished such expense  
 On Clairvaux? — pretty as a toy, but then  
 As toy, so much productive and no more ! 250  
 If all the outcome of the goldsmith's shop  
 Went to gild Clairvaux, where remain the funds  
 For Cousinry to spread out lap and take?  
 This must be thought of and provided for.  
 I give it you as mere conjecture, mind!  
 To help explain the wholesome unannounced  
 Intelligence, the shock that startled guilt,  
 The scenic show, much yellow, black and white  
 By taper-shine, the nuns — portentous pair,  
 And, more than all, the priest's admonishment — 260  
 " No flattery of self ! You murdered her !  
 The gray lips, silent now, reprove by mine.  
 You wasted all your living, rioted  
 In harlotry — she warned and I repeat !  
 No warning had she, for she needed none :  
 If this should be the last yourself receive ? "  
 Done for the best, no doubt, though clumsily, —  
 Such, and so startling, the reception here,  
 You hardly wonder if down fell at once  
 The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical, 270  
 Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts ;  
 Its cobweb-work, betinselled stitchery,  
 Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,  
 And showed the outer towers distinct and dread.

Senseless he fell, and long he lay, and much  
 Seemed salutary in his punishment  
 To planners and performers of the piece.  
 When pain ends, pardon prompt may operate.  
 There was a good attendance close at hand,

76 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Waiting the issue in the great saloon, 280  
 Cousins with consolation and advice.

All things thus happily performed to point,  
 No wonder at success commensurate.  
 Once swooning stopped, once anguish subsequent  
 Raved out, — a sudden resolution chilled  
 His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone,  
 As the poor fellow raised himself upright,  
 Collected strength, looked, once for all, his look,  
 Then, turning, put officious help aside 289  
 And passed from out the chamber. “For affairs!”

So he announced himself to the saloon :  
 “We owe a duty to the living too!” —  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda tried to smile.  
 How did the hearts of Cousinry rejoice  
 At their stray sheep returning thus to fold,  
 As, with a dignity, precision, sense,  
 All unsuspected in the man before,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda made minute  
 Detail of his intended scheme of life  
 Thenceforward and forever. “Vanity 300  
 Was ended : its redemption must begin —

And, certain, would continue ; but since life  
 Was awfully uncertain — witness here ! —  
 Behoved him lose no moment but discharge  
 Immediate burthen of the world’s affairs  
 On backs that kindly volunteered to crouch.  
 Cousins, with easier conscience, blamelessly  
 Might carry on the goldsmith’s trade, in brief,  
 Uninterfered with by its lord who late  
 Was used to supervise and take due tithes. 310  
 A stipend now sufficed his natural need :  
 Themselves should fix what sum allows man live.

But half a dozen words concisely plain  
 Might, first of all, make sure that, on demise,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda's property  
 Passed by bequeathment, every particle,  
 To the right heirs, the cousins of his heart.  
 As for that woman — they would understand !  
 This was a step must take her by surprise.  
 It were too cruel did he snatch away 320  
 Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,  
 And . . . and attractive ! Means must be supplied  
 To save her from herself, and from the world,  
 And . . . from anxieties might haunt him else  
 When he were fain have other thoughts in mind."

It was a sight to melt a stone, that thaw  
 Of rigid disapproval into dew  
 Of sympathy, as each extended palm  
 Of cousin hasted to enclose those five  
 Cold fingers, tendered so mistrustfully, 330  
 Despairingly of condonation now !  
 You would have thought, — at every fervent shake,  
 In reassurance of those timid tips, —  
 The penitent had squeezed, considerate,  
 By way of fee into physician's hand  
 For physicking his soul, some diamond knob.

And now let pass a week. Once more behold  
 The same assemblage in the same saloon,  
 Waiting the entry of protagonist  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda. "Just a week 340  
 Since the death-day, — was ever man transformed  
 Like this man?" questioned cousin of his mate.  
 Last seal to the repentance had been set  
 Three days before, at Sceaux in neighborhood  
 Of Paris, where they laid with funeral pomp

78 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Mother by father. Let me spare the rest :  
 How the poor fellow, in his misery,  
 Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow  
 Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,  
 And there lay, till uprooted by main force 350  
 From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again  
 Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.  
 It is not with impunity priests teach  
 The doctrine he was dosed with from his youth —  
 "Pain to the body — profit to the soul ;  
 Corporeal pleasure — so much woe to pay  
 When disembodied spirit gives account."  
 However, woe had done its worst, this time.  
 Three days allow subsidence of much grief.  
 Already, regular and equable, 360  
 Forward went purpose to effect. At once  
 The testament was written, signed and sealed.  
 Disposal of the commerce — that took time,  
 And would not suffer by a week's delay ;  
 But the immediate, the imperious need,  
 The call demanding of the Cousinry  
 Co-operation, what convened them thus,  
 Was — how and when should deputation march  
 To Coliseum Street, the old abode  
 Of wickedness, and there acquaint — oh, shame ! 370  
 Her, its old inmate, who had followed up  
 And lay in wait in the old haunt for prey —  
 That they had rescued, they possessed Léonce,  
 Whose loathing at recapture equalled theirs —  
 Upbraid that sinner with her sinfulness,  
 Impart the fellow-sinner's firm resolve  
 Never to set eyes on her face again :  
 Then, after stipulations strict but just,  
 Hand her the first instalment, — moderate

Enough, no question, — of her salary : 380  
 Admonish for the future, and so end.—  
 All which good purposes, decided on  
 Sufficiently, were waiting full effect  
 When presently the culprit should appear.

Somehow appearance was delayed too long ;  
 Chatting and chirping sunk unconsciously  
 To silence, nay, uneasiness, at length  
 Alarm, till — anything for certitude ! —  
 A peeper was commissioned to explore,  
 At keyhole, what the laggard's task might be — 390  
 What caused so palpable a disrespect !

Back came the tiptoe cousin from his quest.  
 “ Monsieur Léonce was busy,” he believed,  
 “ Contemplating — those love-letters, perhaps,  
 He always carried, as if precious stones,  
 About with him. He read, one after one,  
 Some sort of letters. But his back was turned.  
 The empty coffer open at his side,  
 He leant on elbow by the mantelpiece  
 Before the hearth-fire ; big and blazing too.” 400

“ Better he shovelled them all in at once,  
 And burned the rubbish !” was a cousin's quip,  
 Warming his own hands at the fire the while.  
 I told you, snow had fallen outside, I think.

When suddenly a cry, a host of cries,  
 Screams, hubbub and confusion thrilled the room.  
 All by a common impulse rushed thence, reached  
 The late death-chamber, tricked with trappings still,  
 Skulls, cross-bones, and such moral broidery.  
 Madame Muhlhausen might have played the witch, 410

Dropped down the chimney and appalled Léonce  
 By some proposal "Parting touch of hand!"  
 If she but touched his foolish hand, you know!!

Something had happened quite contrariwise.  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda, one by one,  
 Had read the letters and the love they held,  
 And, that task finished, had required his soul  
 To answer frankly what the prospect seemed  
 Of his own love's departure — pledged to part!  
 Then, answer being unmistakable, 420  
 He had replaced the letters quietly,  
 Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side  
 By its convenient handle, plunged the whole —  
 Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,  
 Into the burning grate and held them there.  
 "Burn, burn and purify my past!" said he,  
 Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

In vain they pulled him from the torture-place :  
 The strong man, with the soul of tenfold strength,  
 Broke from their clutch : and there again smiled he, 430  
 The miserable hands re-bathed in fire —  
 Constant to that ejaculation "Burn,  
 Burn, purify!" And when, combining force,  
 They fairly dragged the victim out of reach  
 Of further harm, he had no hands to hurt —  
 Two horrible remains of right and left,  
 "Whereof the bones, phalanges formerly,  
 Carbonized, were still crackling with the flame,"  
 Said Beaumont. And he fought them all the while :  
 "Why am I hindered when I would be pure? 440  
 Why leave the sacrifice still incomplete?  
 She holds me, I must have more hands to burn!"  
 They were the stronger, though, and bound him fast.

Beaumont was in attendance presently.

“What did I tell you? Preachment to the deaf!  
I wish he had been deafer when they preached,  
Those priests! But wait till next Republic comes!”

As for Léonce, a single sentiment  
Possessed his soul and occupied his tongue —  
Absolute satisfaction at the deed. 450  
Never he varied, 't is observable,  
Nor in the stage of agonies (which proved  
Absent without leave, — science seemed to think)  
Nor yet in those three months' febricity  
Which followed, — never did he vary tale —  
Remaining happy beyond utterance.

“Ineffable beatitude” — I quote  
The words, I cannot give the smile — “such bliss  
Abolished pain! Pain might or might not be:  
He felt in heaven, where flesh desists to fret. 460  
Purified now and henceforth, all the past  
Reduced to ashes with the flesh defiled!  
Why all those anxious faces round his bed?  
What was to pity in their patient, pray,  
When doctor came and went, and Cousins watched?  
— Kindness, but in pure waste!” he said and smiled.  
And if a trouble would at times disturb  
The ambrosial mood, it came from other source  
Than the corporeal transitory pang.

“If sacrifice be incomplete!” cried he — 470  
“If ashes have not sunk reduced to dust,  
To nullity! If atoms coalesce  
Till something grow, grow, get to be a shape  
I hate, I hoped to burn away from me!  
She is my body, she and I are one,  
Yet, *all the same*, there, there at bed-foot stands



82 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

The woman wound about my flesh and blood,  
There, the arms open, the more wonderful,  
The whiter for the burning . . . Vanish thou !  
Avaunt, fiend's self found in the form I wore !” 480

“Whereat,” said Beaumont, “since his hands were  
gone,  
The patient in a frenzy kicked and licked  
To keep off some imagined visitant.  
So will it prove as long as priests may preach  
Spiritual terrors !” groaned the evidence  
Of Beaumont that his patient was stark mad —  
Produced in time and place : of which anon.  
“Mad, or why thus insensible to pain ?  
Body and soul are one thing, with two names  
For more or less elaborated stuff.” 490

Such is the new *Religio Medici*.  
Though antiquated faith held otherwise,  
Explained that body is not soul, but just  
Soul's servant : that, if soul be satisfied,  
Possess already joy or pain enough,  
It uses to ignore, as master may,  
What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings —  
Superfluous contribution : soul, once served,  
Has naught to do with body's service more.  
Each, speculated on exclusively, 500  
As if its office were the only one,  
Body or soul, either shows service paid  
In joy and pain, that 's blind and objectless —  
A servant's toiling for no master's good —  
Or else shows good received and put to use,  
As if within soul's self grew joy and pain,  
Nor needed body for a ministrant.

I note these old unscientific ways :  
 Poor Beaumont cannot : for the Commune ruled  
 Next year, and ere they shot his priests, shot him. 510

Monsieur Léonce Miranda raved himself  
 To rest ; lay three long months in bliss or bale,  
 Inactive, anyhow : more need that heirs,  
 His natural protectors, should assume  
 The management, bestir their cousinship,  
 And carry out that purpose of reform  
 Such tragic work now made imperative.  
 A deputation, with austerity,  
 Nay, sternness, bore her sentence to the fiend  
 Aforesaid, — she at watch for turn of wheel 520  
 And fortune's favor, Street — you know the name.  
 A certain roughness seemed appropriate : “ You —  
 Steiner, Muhlhausen, whatsoever your name,  
 Cause whole and sole of this catastrophe ! ” —  
 And so forth, introduced the embassy.

“ Monsieur Léonce Miranda was divorced  
 Once and forever from his — ugly word.  
 Himself had gone for good to Portugal :  
 They came empowered to act and stipulate.  
 Hold ! no discussion ! Terms were settled now : 530  
 So much of present and prospective pay,  
 But also — good engagement in plain terms  
 She never seek renewal of the past ! ”

This little harmless tale produced effect.  
 Madame Muhlhausen owned her sentence just,  
 Its execution gentle. “ Stern their phrase,  
 These kinsfolk with a right she recognized —  
 But kind its import probably, which now  
 Her agitation, her bewilderment

84 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

Rendered too hard to understand, perhaps. 540  
Let them accord the natural delay,  
And she would ponder and decide. Meantime,  
So far was she from wish to follow friend  
Who fled her, that she would not budge from place —  
Now that her friend was fled to Portugal, —  
Never ! *She* leave this Coliseum Street ?  
No, not a footstep ! ” she assured them.

So —

They saw they might have left that tale untold  
When, after some weeks more were gone to waste,  
Recovery seemed ircontestable, 550  
And the poor mutilated figure, once  
The gay and glancing fortunate young spark,  
Miranda, humble and obedient took  
The doctor’s counsel, issued sad and slow  
From precincts of the sick-room, tottered down,  
And out, and into carriage for fresh air,  
And so drove straight to Coliseum Street,  
And tottered upstairs, knocked, and in a trice  
Was clasped in the embrace of whom you know —  
With much asseveration, I omit, 560  
Of constancy henceforth till life should end.  
When all this happened, — “ What reward,” cried she,  
“ For judging her Miranda by herself !  
For never having entertained a thought  
Of breaking promise, leaving home forsooth,  
To follow who was fled to Portugal !  
As if she thought they spoke a word of truth !  
She knew what love was, knew that he loved her ;  
The Cousinry knew nothing of the kind.”

I will not scandalize you and recount 570  
How matters made the morning pass away.

Not one reproach, not one acknowledgment,  
 One explanation : all was understood !  
 Matters at end, the home-uneasiness  
 Cousins were feeling at this jaunt prolonged  
 Was ended also by the entry of —  
 Not simply him whose exit had been made  
 By mild command of doctor “ Out with you !  
 I warrant we receive another man ! ”  
 But — would that I could say, the married pair ! 580  
 And, quite another man assuredly,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda took on him  
 Forthwith to bid the trio, priest and nuns,  
 Constant in their attendance all this while,  
 Take his thanks and their own departure too ;  
 Politely but emphatically. Next,  
 The Cousins were dismissed : “ No protest, pray !  
 Whatever I engaged to do is done,  
 Or shall be — I but follow your advice :  
 Love I abjure : the lady, you behold, 590  
 Is changed as I myself ; her sex is changed :  
 This is my Brother — He will tend me now,  
 Be all my world henceforth as brother should.  
 Gentlemen, of a kinship I revere,  
 Your interest in trade is laudable ;  
 I purpose to indulge it : manage mine,  
 My goldsmith-business in the Place Vendôme,  
 Wholly — through purchase at the price adjudged  
 By experts I shall have assistance from.  
 If, in conformity with sage advice, 600  
 I leave a busy world of interests  
 I own myself unfit for — yours the care  
 That any world of other aims, wherein  
 I hope to dwell, be easy of access  
 Through ministration of the moneys due,

86 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

As we determine, with all proper speed,  
Since I leave Paris to repair my health.  
Say farewell to our Cousins, Brother mine ! ”

And, all submissiveness, as brother might,  
The lady curtseyed gracefully, and dropt 610  
More than mere curtsey, a concluding phrase  
So silver-soft, yet penetrative too,  
That none of it escaped the favored ears :  
“ Had I but credited one syllable,  
I should to-day be lying stretched on straw,  
The produce of your miserable *rente* !  
Whereas, I hold him — do you comprehend ? ”  
Cousin regarded cousin, turned up eye,  
And took departure, as our Tuscans laugh,  
Each with his added palm-breadth of long nose, — 620  
Curtailed but imperceptibly, next week,  
When transfer was accomplished, and the trade  
In Paris did indeed become their own,  
But bought by them and sold by him on terms  
'Twixt man and man, — might serve 'twixt wolf and  
wolf,

Substitute “ bit and clawed ” for “ signed and sealed ” —  
Our ordinary business-terms, in short.  
Another week, and Clairvaux broke in bloom  
At end of April, to receive again  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, gentleman, 630  
Ex-jeweller and goldsmith : never more, —  
According to the purpose he professed, —  
To quit this paradise, his property,  
This Clara, his companion : so it proved.

The Cousins, each with elongated nose,  
Discussed their bargain, reconciled them soon  
To *hard necessity*, disbursed the cash,

And hastened to subjoin, wherever type  
 Proclaimed "Miranda" to the public, "Called  
 Now Firm-Miranda." There, a colony, 640  
 They flourish underneath the name that still  
 Maintains the old repute, I understand.  
 They built their Clairvaux, dream-Château, in Spain,  
 Perhaps — but Place Vendôme is waking worth :  
 Oh, they lost little ! — only, man and man  
 Hardly conclude transactions of the kind  
 As cousin should with cousin, — cousins think.  
 For the rest, all was honorably done,  
 So, ere buds break to blossom, let us breathe !  
 Never suppose there was one particle 650  
 Of recrudescence — wound, half-healed before,  
 Set freshly running — sin, repressed as such,  
 New loosened as necessity of life !  
 In all this revocation and resolve,  
 Far be sin's self-indulgence from your thought !  
 The man had simply made discovery,  
 By process I respect if not admire,  
 That what was, was : — that turf, his feet had touched,  
 Felt solid just as much as yonder towers  
 He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon, 660  
 And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.  
 People had told him flowery turf was false  
 To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside :  
 That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride  
 Plants on safe platform and secures man rest."  
 That was untrue. Some varied the advice :  
 "Neither was solid, towers no more than turf."  
 Double assertion, therefore twice as false.  
 "I like these amateurs" — our friend had laughed,  
 Could he turn what he felt to what he thought, 670  
 And, that again, to what he put in words :

" I like their pretty trial, proof of paste  
 Or precious stone, by delicate approach  
 Of eye askance, fine feel of finger-tip,  
 Or touch of tongue inquisitive for cold.  
 I tried my jewels in a crucible :  
 Fierce fire has felt them, licked them, left them sound.  
 Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,  
 My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit !  
 Each may oppose each, yet be true alike ! " 680

To build up, independent of the towers,  
 A durable pavilion o'er the turf,  
 Had issued in disaster. " What remained  
 Except, by tunnel, or else gallery,  
 To keep communication 'twixt the two,  
 Unite the opposites, both near and far,  
 And never try complete abandonment  
 Of one or other ? " so he thought, not said.  
 And to such engineering feat, I say,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda saw the means 690  
 Precisely in this revocation prompt  
 Of just those benefits of worldly wealth  
 Conferred upon his Cousinry — all but !

This Clairvaux — you would know, were you at top  
 Of yonder crowning grace, its Belvedere —  
 Is situate in one angle-niche of three  
 At equidistance from Saint-Rambert — there  
 Behind you, and The Ravissante, beside —  
 There : steeple, steeple, and this Clairvaux-top,  
 (A sort of steeple) constitute a trine, 700  
 With not a tenement to break each side,  
 Two miles or so in length, if eye can judge.  
 Now, this is native land of miracle.  
 O why, why, why, from all recorded time,

Was miracle not wrought once, only once,  
 To help whoever wanted help indeed ?  
 If on the day when Spring's green girlishness  
 Grew nubile and she trembled into May,  
 And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring  
 A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth,       710  
 Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue,  
 And all that new sun, that fresh hope about  
 His airy place of observation, — friend,  
 Feel with me that if just then, just for once,  
 Some angel, — such as the authentic pen  
 Yonder records a daily visitant  
 Of ploughman Claude, rheumatic in the joints,  
 And spinster Jeanne, with megrim troubled sore, —  
 If such an angel, with naught else to do,  
 Had taken station on the pinnacle               720  
 And simply said “ Léonce, look straight before !  
 Neither to right hand nor to left : for why ?  
 Being a stupid soul, you want a guide  
 To turn the goodness in you to account  
 And make stupidity submit itself.  
 Go to Saint-Rambert ! Straightway get such guide !  
 There stands a man of men. You, jeweller,  
 Must needs have heard how once the biggest block  
 Of diamond now in Europe lay exposed  
 Mid specimens of stone and earth and ore,       730  
 On huckster's stall, — Navona names the Square,  
 And Rome the city for the incident, —  
 Labelled ‘ quartz-crystal, price one halfpenny.’  
 Haste and secure that ha'p'worth, on your life !  
 That man will read you rightly head to foot,  
 Mark the brown face of you, the bushy beard,  
 The breadth 'twixt shoulderblades, and through each  
     black



**IN THE BOTTLE WEST-CAP COUNTRY,**

~~...~~ ~~...~~ ~~...~~ — ~~...~~, sense, 739  
No more you — ~~...~~ the horse, your hound, —

~~...~~ — will be ~~...~~ Rome ?

~~...~~ ~~...~~ ~~...~~ be  
~~...~~ ~~...~~ ~~...~~ there !

~~...~~ ~~...~~ ~~...~~,

But for the ~~...~~ that ~~...~~ you call  
You ~~...~~ ~~...~~ you tried to do,  
What ~~...~~ ~~...~~ this next May !

There is ~~...~~ ~~...~~ English newspaper,

Stood ~~...~~ ~~...~~ again upon the move, 750

Place the ~~...~~ to ~~...~~ the Spring, like you,

Since both are human beings in God's eye.

He will have understood you, I engage.

Endeavor, for your part, to understand

He knows more, and loves better, than the world

That never heard his name, and never may.

He will have recognized, ere breath be spent

And speech at end, how much that's good in  
man,

And generous, and self-devoting, makes

Monsieur Léonce Miranda worth his help ; 760

While sounding to the bottom ignorance

Historical and philosophical

And moral and religious, all one couch

Of crassitude, a portent of its kind.

Then, just as he would pityingly teach

Your body to repair maltreatment, give

Advice that you should make those stumps to stir

With artificial hands of caoutchouc,

So would he soon supply your crippled soul

With crutches, from his own intelligence, 770

Able to help you onward in the path  
 Of rectitude whereto your face is set,  
 And counsel justice — to yourself, the first,  
 To your associate, very like a wife  
 Or something better, — to the world at large,  
 Friends, strangers, horses, hounds and Cousinry —  
 All which amount of justice will include  
 Justice to God. Go and consult his voice !”  
 Since angel would not say this simple truth,  
 What hinders that my heart relieve itself, 780  
 Milsand, who makest warm my wintry world,  
 And wise my heaven, if there we consort too ?  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda turned, alas,  
 Or was turned, by no angel, t’other way,  
 And got him guidance of The Ravissante.

Now, into the originals of faith,  
 Yours, mine, Miranda’s, no inquiry here !  
 Of faith, as apprehended by mankind,  
 The causes, were they caught and catalogued,  
 Would too distract, too desperately foil 790  
 Inquirer. How may analyst reduce  
 Quantities to exact their opposites,  
 Value to zero, then bring zero back  
 To value of supreme preponderance ?  
 How substitute thing meant for thing expressed ?  
 Detect the wire-thread through that fluffy silk  
 Men call their rope, their real compulsive power ?  
 Suppose effected such anatomy,  
 And demonstration made of what belief  
 Has moved believer — were the consequence 800  
 Reward at all ? would each man straight deduce,  
 From proved reality of cause, effect  
 Conformable — believe and unbelieve

92 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

According to your True thus disengaged  
From all his heap of False called reason first ?

No : hand once used to hold a soft thick twist,  
Cannot now grope its way by wire alone :  
Childhood may catch the knack, scarce Youth, not Age !  
That 's the reply rewards you. Just as well  
Remonstrate to yon peasant in the blouse 810  
That, had he justified the true intent  
Of Nature who composed him thus and thus,  
Weakly or strongly, here he would not stand  
Struggling with uncongenial earth and sky,  
But elsewhere tread the surface of the globe,  
Since one meridian suits the faulty lungs,  
Another bids the sluggish liver work.

“ Here I was born, for better or for worse :  
I did not choose a climate for myself ;  
Admit, my life were healthy, led elsewhere,” 820  
(He answers) “ how am I to migrate, pray ? ”

Therefore the course to take is — spare your pains,  
And trouble uselessly with discontent  
Nor soul nor body, by parading proof  
That neither haply had known ailment, placed  
Precisely where the circumstance forbade  
Their lot should fall to either of the pair.  
But try and, what you find wrong, remedy,  
Accepting the conditions : never ask  
“ How came you to be born here with those lungs, 830  
That liver ? ” But bid asthma smoke a pipe,  
Stramonium, just as if no Tropics were,  
And ply with calomel the sluggish duct,  
Nor taunt “ The born Norwegian breeds no bile ! ”  
And as with body, so proceed with soul :  
Nor less discerningly, where faith you found,

However foolish and fantastic, grudge  
 To play the doctor and amend mistake,  
 Because a wisdom were conceivable  
 Whence faith had sprung robust above disease. 840  
 Far beyond human help, that source of things !  
 Since, in the first stage, so to speak, — first stare  
 Of apprehension at the invisible, —  
 Begins divergency of mind from mind,  
 Superior from inferior : leave this first !  
 Little you change there ! What comes afterward —  
 From apprehended thing, each inference  
 With practicality concerning life,  
 This you may test and try, confirm the right  
 Or contravene the wrong which reasons there. 850  
 The offspring of the sickly faith must prove  
 Sickly act also : stop a monster-birth !  
 When water 's in the cup and not the cloud,  
 Then is the proper time for chemic test :  
 Belief permits your skill to operate  
 When, drop by drop condensed from misty heaven,  
 'T is wrung out, lies a bowlful in the fleece.  
 How dew by spoonfuls came, let Gideon say :  
 What purpose water serves, your word or two  
 May teach him, should he fancy it lights fire. 860

Concerning, then, our vaporous Ravissante —  
 How fable first precipitated faith —  
 Silence you get upon such point from me.  
 But when I see come posting to the pair  
 At Clairvaux, for the cure of soul-disease,  
 This Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,  
 This Mother of the Convent, Nun I know —  
 They practise in that second stage of things ;  
 They boast no fresh distillery of faith :

94 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

'T is dogma in the bottle, bright and old, 870  
They bring ; and I pretend to pharmacy.  
They undertake the cure with all my heart !  
He trusts them, and they surely trust themselves.  
I ask no better. Never mind the cause,  
*Fons et origo* of the malady :  
Apply the drug with courage ! Here 's our case.  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda asks of God,  
— May a man, living in illicit tie,  
Continue, by connivance of the Church,  
No matter what amends he please to make 880  
Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin ?  
Physicians, what do you propose for cure ?

Father and Mother of the Ravissante,  
Read your own records, and you find prescribed  
As follows, when a couple out of sorts  
Rather than gravely suffering, sought your skill  
And thereby got their health again. Perpend !  
Two and a half good centuries ago,  
Luc de la Maison Rouge, a nobleman  
Ot Claise, (the river gives this country name) 890  
And, just as noblewoman, Maude his wife,  
Having been married many happy years  
Spent in God's honor and man's service too,  
Conceived, while yet in flower of youth and hope,  
The project of departing each from each  
Forever, and dissolving marriage-bonds  
That both might enter a religious life.  
Needing, before they came to such resolve,  
Divine illumination, — course was clear, —  
They visited your church in pilgrimage, 900  
On Christmas morn : communicating straight,  
They heard three Masses proper for the day,

"It is incredible with what effect" —  
 Quoth the Cistercian monk I copy from —  
 And, next day, came, again communicants,  
 Again heard Masses manifold, but now  
 With added thanks to Christ for special grace  
 And consolation granted : in the night,  
 Had been divorce from marriage, manifest  
 By signs and tokens. So, they made great gifts, 910  
 Left money for more Masses, and returned  
 Homeward rejoicing — he, to take the rules,  
 As Brother Dionysius, Capucin ;  
 She, to become first postulant, then nun  
 According to the rules of Benedict,  
 Sister Scolastica : so ended they,  
 And so do I — not end nor yet commence  
 One note or comment. What was done was done.  
 Now, Father of the Mission, here 's your case !  
 And, Mother of the Convent, here 's its cure ! 920  
 If separation was permissible,  
 And that decree of Christ "What God hath joined  
 Let no man put asunder" nullified  
 Because a couple, blameless in the world,  
 Had the conceit that, still more blamelessly,  
 Out of the world, by breach of marriage-vow,  
 Their life was like to pass, — you oracles  
 Of God, — since holy Paul says such you are, —  
 Hesitate, not one moment, to pronounce  
 When questioned by the pair now needing help 930  
 "Each from the other go, you guilty ones,  
 Preliminary to your least approach  
 Nearer the Power that thus could strain a point  
 In favor of a pair of innocents  
 Who thought their wedded hands not clean enough  
 To touch *and leave* unsullied their souls' snow !

96 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Are not your hands found filthy by the world,  
Mere human law and custom? Not a step  
Nearer till hands be washed and purified!"

What they did say is immaterial, since 940  
Certainly it was nothing of the kind.

There was no washing hands of him (alack,  
You take me? — in the figurative sense!),  
But, somehow, gloves were drawn o'er dirt and all,  
And practice with the Church procured thereby,  
Seeing that, — all remonstrance proved in vain,  
Persuasives tried and terrors put to use,  
I nowise question, — still the guilty pair  
Only embraced the closelier, obstinate, —  
Father and Mother went from Clairvaux back 950  
Their weary way, with heaviness of heart,  
I grant you, but each palm well crossed with coin,  
And nothing like a smutch perceptible.  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might compound  
For sin? — no, surely! but by gifts — prepare  
His soul the better for contrition, say!  
Gift followed upon gift, at all events.  
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:  
Hard money, on the other — may we hope  
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse? 960

Two years did this experiment engage  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda: how, by gifts  
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay  
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.  
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed  
For this man's nature: generosity, —  
Susceptibility to human ills,  
Corporeal, mental, — self-devotedness  
Made up Miranda — whether strong or weak

Elsewhere, may be inquired another time. 970

In mercy he was strong, at all events.

Enough ! he could not see a beast in pain,

Much less a man, without the will to aid ;

And where the will was, oft the means were too,

Since that good bargain with the Cousinry.

The news flew fast about the countryside

That, with the kind man, it was ask and have ;

And ask and have they did. To instance you : —

A mob of beggars at The Ravissante 979

Clung to his skirts one day, and cried “ We thirst ! ”

Forthwith he bade a cask of wine be broached

To satisfy all comers, till, dead-drunk

So satisfied, they strewed the holy place.

For this was grown religious and a rite :

Such slips of judgment, gifts irregular,

Showed but as spillings of the golden grist

On either side the hopper, through blind zeal ;

Steadily the main stream went pouring on

From mill to mouth of sack — held wide and close

By Father of the Mission, Parish-priest, 990

And Mother of the Convent, Nun I know,

With such effect that, in the sequel, proof

Was tendered to the Court at Vire, last month,

That in these same two years, expenditure

At quiet Clairvaux rose to the amount

Of Forty Thousand English Pounds : whereof

A trifle went, no inappropriate close

Of bounty, to supply the Virgin's crown

With that stupendous jewel from New-York,

Now blazing as befits the Star of Sea. 1000

Such signs of grace, outward and visible,

*I rather give you, for your sake and mine.*



Than put in evidence the inward strife,  
 Spiritual effort to compound for fault  
 By payment of devotion — thank the phrase !  
 That payment was as punctual, do not doubt,  
 As its far easier fellow. Yesterday  
 I trudged the distance from The Ravissante  
 To Clairvaux, with my two feet : but our friend,  
 The more to edify the country-folk, 1010  
 Was wont to make that journey on both knees.  
 “ Maliciously perverted incident ! ”  
 Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire :  
 “ The man paid mere devotion as he passed,  
 Knelt decently at just each wayside shrine ! ”  
 Alas, my lawyer, I trudged yesterday —  
 On my two feet, and with both eyes wide ope, —  
 The distance, and could find no shrine at all !  
 According to his lights, I praise the man.  
 Enough ! incessant was devotion, say — 1020  
 With her, you know of, praying at his side.  
 Still, there be relaxations of the tense ;  
 Or life indemnifies itself for strain,  
 Or finds its very strain grow feebleness.  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda’s days were passed  
 Much as of old, in simple work and play.  
 His first endeavor, on recovery  
 From that sad ineffectual sacrifice,  
 Had been to set about repairing loss :  
 Never admitting, loss was to repair. 1030  
 No word at any time escaped his lips  
 — Betrayed a lurking presence, in his heart,  
 Of sorrow ; no regret for mischief done —  
 Punishment suffered, he would rather say.  
 Good-tempered schoolboy-fashion, he preferred  
 To laugh away his flogging, fair price paid

For pleasure out of bounds : if needs must be,  
 Get pleasure and get flogged a second time!  
 A sullen subject would have nursed the scars  
 And made excuse, for throwing grammar by,     1040  
 That bench was grown uneasy to the seat:  
 No : this poor fellow cheerfully got hands  
 Fit for his stumps, and what hands failed to do,  
 The other members did in their degree —  
 Unwonted service. With his mouth alone  
 He wrote, nay, painted pictures — think of that!  
 He played on a piano pedal-keyed,  
 Kicked out — if it was Bach's — good music thence.  
 He rode, that's readily conceivable,  
 But then he shot and never missed his bird,     1050  
 With other feats as dexterous : I infer  
 He was not ignorant what hands are worth,  
 When he resolved on ruining his own.

So the two years passed somehow — who shall say  
 Foolishly, — as one estimates mankind,  
 The work they do, the play they leave undone?—  
 Two whole years spent in that experiment  
 I told you of, at Clairvaux all the time,  
 From April on to April : why that month  
 More than another, notable in life?     1060  
 Does the awakening of the year arouse  
 Man to new projects, nerve him for fresh feats  
 Of what proves, for the most part of mankind  
 Playing or working, novel folly too?  
 At any rate, I see no slightest sign  
 Of folly (let me tell you in advance),  
 Nothing but wisdom meets me manifest  
 In the procedure of the Twentieth Day  
 Of April, 'Seventy, — folly's year in France.

100 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

It was delightful Spring, and out of doors                    1070  
Temptation to adventure. Walk or ride?  
There was a wild young horse to exercise,  
And teach the way to go and pace to keep :  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda chose to ride.  
So, while they clapped soft saddle straight on back,  
And bitted jaw to satisfaction, — since  
The partner of his days must stay at home,  
Teased by some trifling legacy of March  
To throat or shoulder, — visit duly paid  
And “farewell” given and received again, —                    1080  
As chamber-door considerably closed  
Behind him, still five minutes were to spend.  
How better, than by clearing, two and two,  
The staircase-steps and coming out aloft  
Upon the platform yonder (raise your eyes !)  
And tasting, just as those two years before,  
Spring’s bright advance upon the tower a-top,  
The feature of the front, the Belvedere ?

Look at it for a moment while I breathe.

IV.

Ready to hear the rest? How good you are !

Now for this Twentieth splendid day of Spring,  
All in a tale, — sun, wind, sky, earth and sea, —  
To bid man “Up, be doing !” Mount the stair,  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda mounts so brisk,  
And look — ere his elastic foot arrive —  
Your longest, far and wide, o’er fronting space.  
Yon white streak — Havre lighthouse! Name and  
name,  
*How* the mind runs from each to each relay,

Town after town, till Paris' self be touched, 10  
 Superlatively big with life and death  
 To all the world, that very day perhaps !  
 He who stepped out upon the platform here,  
 Pinnacled over the expanse, gave thought  
 Neither to Rouher nor Ollivier, Roon  
 Nor Bismarck, Emperor nor King, but just  
 To steeple, church, and shrine, The Ravissante !

He saw Her, whom myself saw, but when Spring  
 Was passing into Fall : not robed and crowned  
 As, thanks to him, and her you know about, 20  
 She stands at present ; but She smiled the same.  
 Thither he turned — to never turn away.

He thought . . .

(Suppose I should prefer "He said ?"  
 Along with every act — and speech is act —  
 There go, a multitude impalpable  
 To ordinary human faculty,  
 The thoughts which give the act significance.  
 Who is a poet needs must apprehend  
 Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.  
 Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry : 30  
 Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word at all,  
 But thought as follows — in a minute's space —  
 One particle of ore beats out such leaf !

"This Spring-morn I am forty-three years old :  
 In prime of life, perfection of estate  
 Bodily, mental, nay, material too, —  
 My whole of worldly fortunes reach their height.  
*Body and soul alike on eminence :*

102 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

It is not probable I ever raise 40  
 Soul above standard by increase of worth,  
 Nor reasonably may expect to lift  
 Body beyond the present altitude.

“ Behold me, Lady called The Ravissante !  
 Such as I am, I — gave myself to you  
 So long since, that I cannot say ‘ I give.’  
 All my belongings, what is summed in life,  
 I have submitted wholly — as man might,  
 At least, as *I* might, who am weak, not strong,—  
 Wholly, then, to your rule and governance, 50  
 So far as I had strength. My weakness was —  
 I felt a fascination, at each point  
 And pore of me, a Power as absolute  
 Claiming that soul should recognize her sway.  
 O you were no whit clearer Queen, I see,  
 Throughout the life that rolls out ribbon-like  
 Its shot-silk length behind me, than the strange  
 Mystery — how shall I denominate  
 The unrobed One? Robed you go and crowned as  
 well,  
 Named by the nations: she is hard to name, 60  
 Though you have spelt out certain characters  
 Obscure upon what fillet binds her brow,  
*Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, life's pride.*  
 ‘ So call her, and condemn the enchantress ! ’ — ‘ Crush  
 The despot, and recover liberty ! ’ —  
 Cried despot and enchantress at each ear.  
 You were conspicuous and pre-eminent,  
 Authoritative and imperial, — you  
 Spoke first, claimed homage: did I hesitate?  
 Born for no mastery, but servitude, 70  
*Men cannot serve two masters, says the Book:*

Master should measure strength with master, then,  
 Before on servant is imposed a task.  
 You spoke first, promised best, and threatened most ;  
 The other never threatened, promised, spoke  
 A single word, but, when your part was done,  
 Lifted a finger, and I, prostrate, knew  
 Films were about me, though you stood aloof  
 Smiling or frowning ' Where is power like mine  
 To punish or reward thee ? Rise, thou fool !      80  
 Will to be free, and, lo, I lift thee loose !'  
 Did I not will, and could I rise a whit ?  
 Lay I, at any time, content to lie ?  
 ' To lie, at all events, brings pleasure : make  
 Amends by undemanded pain !' I said.  
 Did not you prompt me ? ' Purchase now by pain  
 Pleasure hereafter in the world to come !'  
 I could not pluck my heart out, as you bade  
 Unbidden, I burned off my hands at least.  
 My soul retained its treasure ; but my purse      90  
 Lightened itself with much alacrity.  
 Well, where is the reward ? what promised fruit  
 Of sacrifice in peace, content ? what sense  
 Of added strength to bear or to forbear ?  
 What influx of new light assists me now  
 Even to guess you recognize a gain  
 In what was loss enough to mortal me ?  
 But she, the less authoritative voice,  
 Oh, how distinct enunciating, how  
 Plain dealing ! Gain she gave was gain indeed ! 100  
 That, you deny : that, you contemptuous call  
 Acorns, swine's food not man's meat ! ' Spurn the  
 draff !'  
 Ay, but those life-tree apples I prefer,  
 Am I to die of hunger till they drop ?

Husks keep flesh from starvation, anyhow.  
 Give those life-apples! — one, worth woods of oak,  
 Worth acorns by the wagon-load, — one shoot  
 Through heart and brain, assurance bright and brief  
 That you, my Lady, my own Ravissante,  
 Feel, through my famine, served and satisfied,     110  
 Own me, your starveling, soldier of a sort!  
 Your soldier! do I read my title clear  
 Even to call myself your friend, not foe?  
 What is the pact between us but a truce?  
 At best I shall have staved off enmity,  
 Obtained a respite, ransomed me from wrath.  
 I pay, instalment by instalment, life,  
 Earth's tribute-money, pleasures great and small,  
 Whereof should at the last one penny piece  
 Fall short, the whole heap becomes forfeiture.     120  
 You find in me deficient soldiership:  
 Want the whole life or none. I grudge that whole,  
 Because I am not sure of recompense:  
 Because I want faith. Whose the fault? I ask.  
 If insufficient faith have done thus much,  
 Contributed thus much of sacrifice,  
 More would move mountains, you are warrant.     Well,  
 Grant, you, the grace, I give the gratitude!  
 And what were easier? 'Ask and have' folk call  
 Miranda's method: 'Have, nor need to ask!'     130  
 So do they formulate your quality  
 Superlative beyond my human grace.  
 The Ravissante, you ravish men away  
 From puny aches and petty pains, assuaged  
 By man's own art with small expenditure  
 Of pill or potion, unless, put to shame,  
 Nature is roused and sets things right herself.  
*Your miracles are grown our commonplace;*

No day but pilgrim hobbles his last mile,  
 Kneels down and rises up, flings crutch away, 140  
 Or else appends it to the reverend heap  
 Beneath you, votive cripple-carpentry.  
 Some few meet failure — oh, they wanted faith,  
 And may betake themselves to La Salette,  
 Or seek Lourdes, so that hence the scandal limp !  
 The many get their grace and go their way  
 Rejoicing, with a tale to tell, — most like,  
 A staff to borrow, since the crutch is gone,  
 Should the first telling happen at my house,  
 And teller wet his whistle with my wine. 150  
*I tell this to a doctor and he laughs :*  
 ‘ Give me permission to cry — Out of bed,  
 You loth rheumatic sluggard ! Cheat yon chair  
 Of laziness, its gouty occupant ! —  
 You should see miracles performed. But now,  
 I give advice, and take as fee ten francs,  
 And do as much as does your Ravissante.  
 Send her that case of cancer to be cured  
 I have refused to treat for any fee, 159  
 Bring back my would-be patient sound and whole,  
 And see me laugh on t’other side my mouth !’  
 Can he be right, and are you hampered thus ?  
 Such pettiness restricts a miracle  
 Wrought by the Great Physician, who hears prayer,  
 Visibly seated in your mother-lap !  
 He, out of nothing, made sky, earth, and sea,  
 And all that in them is — man, beast, bird, fish,  
 Down to this insect on my parapet.  
 Look how the marvel of a minim crawls !  
 Were I to kneel among the halt and maimed, 170  
 And pray ‘ Who mad’st the insect with ten legs,  
 Make me one finger grow where ten were once !’



The very priests would thrust me out of church.  
 'What folly does the madman dare expect?  
 No faith obtains — in this late age, at least —  
 Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!'

'Ay, bring the early ages back again,  
 What prodigy were unattainable?  
 I read your annals. Here came Louis Onze,  
 Gave thrice the sum he ever gave before 180  
 At one time, some three hundred crowns, to wit —  
 On pilgrimage to pray for — health, he found?  
 Did he? I do not read it in Commines.  
 Here sent poor joyous Marie-Antoinette  
 To thank you that a Dauphin dignified  
 Her motherhood — called Duke of Normandy  
 And Martyr of the Temple, much the same  
 As if no robe of hers had dressed you rich;  
 No silver lamps, she gave, illumed your shrine!  
 Here, following example, fifty years 190  
 Ago, in gratitude for birth again  
 Of yet another destined King of France,  
 Did not the Duchess fashion with her hands,  
 And frame in gold and crystal, and present  
 A bouquet made of artificial flowers?  
 And was he King of France, and is not he  
 Still Count of Chambord?

'Such the days of faith,  
 And such their produce to encourage mine!  
 What now, if I too count without my host?  
 I too have given money, ornament, 200  
 And 'artificial flowers' — which, when I plucked,  
 Seemed rooting at my heart and real enough:  
 What if I gain thereby nor health of mind,  
 Nor youth renewed which perished in its prime,

Burnt to a cinder 'twixt the red-hot bars,  
 Nor gain to see my second baby-hope  
 Of managing to live on terms with both  
 Opposing potentates, the Power and you,  
 Crowned with success? I dawdle out my days  
 In exile here at Clairvaux, with mock love, 210  
 That gives — while whispering 'Would I dared re-  
 fuse!' —

What the loud voice declares my heart's free gift :  
 Mock worship, mock superiority  
 O'er those I style the world's benighted ones,  
 That irreligious sort I pity so,  
 Dumas and even Hertford who is Duke.

“ Impiety ? Not if I know myself !  
 Not if you know the heart and soul I bare,  
 I bid you cut, hack, slash, anatomize,  
 Till peccant part be found and flung away ! 220  
 Demonstrate where I need more faith ! Describe  
 What act shall evidence sufficiency  
 Of faith, your warrant for such exercise  
 Of power, in my behalf, as all the world  
 Except poor praying me declares profuse ?  
 Poor me ? It is that world, not me alone,  
 That world which prates of fixed laws and the like,  
 I fain would save, poor world so ignorant !  
 And your part were — what easy miracle ?  
 Oh, Lady, could I make your want like mine ! ” 230

Then his face grew one luminosity.

“ Simple, sufficient ! Happiness at height !  
 I solve the riddle, I persuade mankind.  
 I have been *just the simpleton* who stands —

108 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Summoned to claim his patrimonial rights —  
At shilly-shally, may he knock or no  
At his own door in his own house and home  
Whereof he holds the very title-deeds!  
Here is my title to this property,  
This power you hold for profit of myself                   240  
And all the world at need — which need is now!

“ My title — let me hear who controverts!  
Count Mailleville built yon church. Why did he so?  
Because he found your image. How came that?  
His shepherd told him that a certain sheep  
Was wont to scratch with hoof and scrape with horn  
At ground where once the Dunes had razed a church.  
Thither he went, and there he dug, and thence  
He disinterred the image he conveyed  
In pomp to Londres yonder, his domain.                   250  
You liked the old place better than the new.  
The Count might surely have divined as much:  
He did not; some one might have spoke a word:  
No one did. A mere dream had warned enough  
That back again in pomp you best were borne:  
No dream warned, and no need of convoy was;  
An angel caught you up and clapped you down —  
No mighty task, you stand one *mètre* high,  
And people carry you about at times.  
Why, then, did you despise the simple course?           260  
Because you are the Queen of Angels: when  
You front us in a picture, there flock they,  
Angels around you, here and everywhere.

“ Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,  
Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,  
I summon them to bear me to your feet

From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip !  
 Faith without flaw ! I trust your potency,  
 Benevolence, your will to save the world —  
 By such a simplest of procedures, too ! 270  
 Not even by affording angel-help,  
 Unless it please you : there 's a simpler mode :  
 Only suspend the law of gravity,  
 And, while at back, permitted to propel,  
 The air helps onward, let the air in front  
 Cease to oppose my passage through the midst !

“ Thus I bestride the railing, leg o'er leg,  
 Thus, lo, I stand, a single inch away,  
 At dizzy edge of death, — no touch of fear,  
 As safe on tower above as turf below ! 280  
 Your smile enswathes me in beatitude,  
 You lift along the votary — who vaults,  
 Who, in the twinkling of an eye, revives,  
 Dropt safely in the space before the church —  
 How crowded, since this morn is market-day !  
 I shall not need to speak. The news will run  
 Like wild-fire. ‘ Thousands saw Miranda's flight ! ’  
 'T is telegraphed to Paris in a trice.  
 The Boulevard is one buzz ‘ Do you believe ?  
 Well, this time, thousands saw Miranda's flight : 290  
 You know him, goldsmith in the Place Vendôme.’  
 In goes the Empress to the Emperor :  
 ‘ Now — will you hesitate to make disgorge  
 Your wicked King of Italy his gains,  
 Give the Legations to the Pope once more ? ’  
 Which done, — why, grace goes back to operate,  
 They themselves set a good example first,  
 Resign the empire twenty years usurped,  
 And Henry, the Desired One, reigns o'er France !

110 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Regenerated France makes all things new ! 300  
My house no longer stands on Quai Rousseau  
But Quai rechristened Alacoque : a quai  
Where Renan burns his book, and Veuillot burns  
Renan beside, since Veuillot rules the roast,  
Re-edits now indeed ' The Universe.'  
O blessing, O superlatively big  
With blessedness beyond all blessing dreamed  
By man ! for just that promise has effect,  
' Old things shall pass away and all be new !'  
Then, for a culminating mercy-feat, 310  
Wherefore should I dare dream impossible  
That I too have my portion in the change ?  
My past with all its sorrow, sin and shame,  
Becomes a blank, a nothing ! There she stands,  
Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,  
Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence !  
There never was Muhlhausen, nor at all  
Duke Hertford : naught that was, remains, except  
The beauty, — yes, the beauty is unchanged !  
Well, and the soul too, that must keep the same ! 320  
And so the trembling little virgin hand  
Melts into mine, that 's back again, of course !  
— Think not I care about my poor old self !  
I only want my hand for that one use,  
To take her hand, and say ' I marry you —  
Men, women, angels, you behold my wife !  
There is no secret, nothing wicked here,  
Nothing she does not wish the world to know !'  
None of your married women have the right  
To mutter ' Yes, indeed, she beats us all 330  
In beauty, — but our lives are pure at least !'  
Bear witness, for our marriage is no thing  
*Done in a corner !* 'T is The Ravissante

Repairs the wrong of Paris. See, She smiles,  
 She beckons, She bids ' Hither, both of you !'  
 And may we kneel ? And will you bless us both ?  
 And may I worship you, and yet love her ?  
 Then !' —

A sublime spring from the balustrade  
 About the tower so often talked about,  
 A flash in middle air, and stone-dead lay 340  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda on the turf.

A gardener who watched, at work the while  
 Dibbling a flower-bed for geranium-shoots,  
 Saw the catastrophe, and, straightening back,  
 Stood up and shook his brows. " Poor soul, poor  
 soul !

Just what I prophesied the end would be !  
 Ugh — the Red Night-cap !" (as he raised the head)  
 " This must be what he meant by those strange words  
 While I was weeding larkspurs yesterday, 349  
 ' Angels would take him !' Mad !"

No ! sane, I say.

Such being the conditions of his life,  
 Such end of life was not irrational.  
 Hold a belief, you only half-believe,  
 With all-momentous issues either way, —  
 And I advise you imitate this leap,  
 Put faith to proof, be cured or killed at once !  
 Call you men, killed through cutting cancer out,  
 The worse for such an act of bravery ?  
 That's more than I know. In my estimate,  
 Better lie prostrate on his turf at peace, 360  
 Than, wistful, eye, from out the tent, the tower,  
*Racked with a doubt* " Will going on bare knees

112 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

All the way to The Ravissante and back,  
Saying my Ave Mary all the time,  
Somewhat excuse if I postpone my march ?  
— Make due amends for that one kiss I gave  
In gratitude to her who held me out  
Superior Fricquot's sermon, hot from press,  
A-spread with hands so sinful yet so smooth ? ”

And now, sincerely do I pray she stand, 370  
Clara, with interposing sweep of robe,  
Between us and this horror ! Any screen  
Turns white by contrast with the tragic pall ;  
And her dubiety distracts at least,  
As well as snow, from such decided black.  
With womanhood, at least, we have to do :  
Ending with Clara — is the word too kind ?

Let pass the shock ! There's poignancy enough  
When what one parted with, a minute since,  
Alive and happy, is returned a wreck — 380  
All that was, all that seemed about to be,  
Razed out and ruined now for evermore,  
Because a straw descended on this scale  
Rather than that, made death o'erbalance life.  
But think of cage-mates in captivity,  
Inured to day-long, night-long vigilance  
Each of the other's tread and angry turn  
If behind prison-bars the jailer knocked :  
These whom society shut out, and thus  
Penned in, to settle down and regulate 390  
By the strange law, the solitary life —  
When death divorces such a fellowship,  
Theirs may pair off with that prodigious woe  
*Imagined of a ghastly brotherhood —*

One watcher left in lighthouse out at sea  
 With leagues of surf between the land and him  
 Alive with his dead partner on the rock ;  
 One galley-slave, whom curse and blow compel  
 To labor on, ply oar — beside his chain,  
 Encumbered with a corpse-companion now. 400  
 Such these : although, no prisoners, self-entrenched  
 They kept the world off from their barricade.

Memory, gratitude was poignant, sure,  
 Though pride brought consolation of a kind.  
 Twenty years long had Clara been — of whom  
 The rival, nay, the victor, past dispute?  
 What if in turn *The Ravissante* at length  
 Proved victor — which was doubtful — anyhow,  
 Here lay the inconstant with, conspicuous too,  
 The fruit of his good fortune !

“ Has he gained 410

By leaving me ?” she might soliloquize :  
 “ All love could do, I did for him. I learned  
 By heart his nature, what he loved and loathed,  
 Leaned to with liking, turned from with distaste.  
 No matter what his least velleity,  
 I was determined he should want no wish,  
 And in conformity administered  
 To his requirement ; most of joy I mixed  
 With least of sorrow in life’s daily draught,  
 Twenty years long, life’s proper average. 420  
 And when he got to quarrel with my cup,  
 Would needs outsweeten honey, and discard  
 That gall-drop we require lest nectar cloy, —  
 I did not call him fool, and vex my friend,  
 But quietly allowed experiment,



114 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Encouraged him to spice his drink, and now  
 Grate *lignum vitæ*, now bruise so-called grains  
 Of Paradise, and pour now, for perfume,  
 Distilment rare, the rose of Jericho,  
 Holy-thorn, passion-flower, and what know I? 430  
 Till beverage obtained the fancied smack.

'T was wild-flower-wine that neither helped nor  
 harmed

Who sipped and held it for restorative —  
 What harm? But here has he been through the hedge  
 Straying in search of simples, while my back  
 Was turned a minute, and he finds a prize,  
 Monkshood and belladonna! O my child,  
 My truant little boy, despite the beard,  
 The body two feet broad and six feet long,  
 And what the calendar counts middle age — 440

You wanted, did you, to enjoy a flight?  
 Why not have taken into confidence  
 Me, that was mother to you? — never mind  
 What mock disguise of mistress held you mine!  
 Had you come laughing, crying, with request,  
 'Make me fly, mother!' I had run upstairs  
 And held you tight the while I danced you high  
 In air from tower-top, singing 'Off we go  
 (On pilgrimage to Lourdes some day next month)  
 And swift we soar (to Rome with Peter-pence) 450  
 And low we light (at Paris where we pick  
 Another jewel from our store of stones  
 And send it for a present to the Pope)!'   
 So, dropt indeed you were, but on my knees,  
 Rolling and crowing, not a whit the worse  
 For journey to your Ravissante and back.  
 Now, no more Clairvaux — which I made you build,  
 And think an inspiration of your own —

No more fine house, trim garden, pretty park,  
 Nothing I used to busy you about, 460  
 And make believe you worked for my surprise !  
 What weariness to me will work become  
 Now that I need not seem surprised again !  
 This boudoir, for example, with the doves  
 (My stupid maid has damaged, dusting one)  
 Embossed in stucco o'er the looking-glass  
 Beside the toilet-table ! dear — dear me !”

Here she looked up from her absorbing grief,  
 And round her, crow-like grouped, the Cousinry,  
 (She grew aware) sat witnesses at watch. 470  
 For, two days had elapsed since fate befell  
 The courser in the meadow, stretched so stark.  
 They did not cluster on the tree-tops, close  
 Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate  
 For nothing : but, like calm determined crows,  
 They came to take possession of their corpse.  
 And who shall blame them ? Had not they the right ?

One spoke. “ They would be gentle, not austere.  
 They understood and were compassionate.  
 Madame Muhlhausen lay too abject now 480  
 For aught but the sincerest pity ; still,  
 Since plain speech salves the wound it seems to make,  
 They must speak plainly — circumstances spoke !  
 Sin had conceived and brought forth death indeed.  
 As the commencement so the close of things :  
 Just what might be expected all along !  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda launched his youth  
 Into a cesspool of debauchery,  
 And if he thence emerged all dripping slime,  
 Where was the change except from thin to thick, 490  
 One warm rich mud-bath, Madame ? — you, in place

Of Paris-drainage and distilment, you  
 He never needed budge from, boiled to rags!  
 True, some good instinct left the natural man,  
 Some touch of that deep dye wherewith imbued  
 By education, in his happier day,  
 The hopeful offspring of high parentage  
 Was fleece-marked moral and religious sheep, —  
 Some ruddle, faint remainder, (we admit)  
 Stuck to Miranda, rubbed he ne'er so rude      500  
 Against the goatly coarseness : to the last,  
 Moral he styled himself, religious too!  
 Which means — what ineradicable good  
 You found, you never left till good's self proved  
 Perversion and distortion, nursed to growth  
 So monstrous, that the tree-stock, dead and dry,  
 Were seemlier far than such a heap grotesque  
 Of fungous flourishing excrescence. Here  
 Sap-like affection, meant for family,  
 Stole off to feed one sucker fat — yourself;      510  
 While branchage, trained religiously aloft  
 To rear its head in reverence to the sun,  
 Was pulled down earthward, pegged and picketed,  
 By topiary contrivance, till the tree  
 Became an arbor where, at vulgar ease,  
 Sat superstition grinning through the loops.  
 Still, nature is too strong or else too weak  
 For cockney treatment : either, tree springs back  
 To pristine shape, or else degraded droops,  
 And turns to touchwood at the heart. So here — 520  
 Body and mind, at last the man gave way.  
 His body — there it lies, what part was left  
 Unmutilated ! for, the strife commenced  
 Two years ago, when both hands burnt to ash,  
 — A branch broke loose, by loss of what choice twigs!

As for his mind — behold our register  
 Of all its moods, from the incipient mad,  
 Nay, mere erratic, to the stark insane,  
 Absolute idiocy or what is worse !  
 All have we catalogued — extravagance 530  
 In worldly matters, luxury absurd,  
 And zeal as crazed in its expenditure  
 Of nonsense called devotion. Don't we know  
 — We Cousins, bound in duty to our kin, —  
 What mummeries were practised by you two  
 At Clairvaux ? Not a servant got discharge  
 But came and told his grievance, testified  
 To acts which turn religion to a farce.  
 And as the private mock, so patent — see —  
 The public scandal ! Ask the neighborhood — 540  
 Or rather, since we asked them long ago,  
 Read what they answer, depositions down,  
 Signed, sealed and sworn to ! Brief, the man was mad.  
 We are his heirs and claim our heritage.  
 Madame Muhlhausen, — whom good taste forbids  
 We qualify as do these documents, —  
 Fear not lest justice stifle mercy's prayer !  
 True, had you lent a willing ear at first,  
 Had you obeyed our call two years ago,  
 Restrained a certain insolence of eye, 550  
 A volubility of tongue, that time,  
 Your prospects had been none the worse, perhaps.  
 Still, fear not but a decent competence  
 Shall smooth the way for your declining age !  
 What we propose, then . . .”

Clara dried her eyes,  
 Sat up, surveyed the consistory, spoke  
 After due pause, with something of a smile.

" Gentlemen, kinsfolk of my friend defunct,  
 In thus addressing me — of all the world ! —  
 You much misapprehend what part I play. 560  
 I claim no property you speak about.  
 You might as well address the park-keeper,  
 Harangue him on some plan advisable  
 For covering the park with cottage-plots.  
 He is the servant, no proprietor,  
 His business is to see the sward kept trim,  
 Untrespassed over by the indiscreet :  
 Beyond that, he refers you to myself —  
 Another servant of another kind —  
 Who again — quite as limited in act — 570  
 Refer you, with your projects, — can I else ?  
 To who in mastery is ultimate,  
 The Church. The Church is sole administrant,  
 Since sole possessor of what worldly wealth  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda late possessed.  
 Often enough has he attempted, nay,  
 Forced me, well-nigh, to occupy the post  
 You seemingly suppose I fill, — receive  
 As gift the wealth entrusted me as grace.  
 This — for quite other reasons than appear 580  
 So cogent to your perspicacity —  
 This I refused ; and, firm as you could wish,  
 Still was my answer ' We two understand  
 Each one the other. I am intimate  
 — As how can be mere fools and knaves — or, say,  
 Even your Cousins ? — with your love to me,  
 Devotion to the Church. Would Providence  
 Appoint, and make me certain of the same,  
 That I survive you (which is little like,  
 Seeing you hardly overpass my age 590  
 And more than match me in abundant health)

In such case, certainly I would accept  
 Your bounty : better I than alien hearts  
 Should execute your planned benevolence  
 To man, your proposed largess to the Church.  
 But though I be survivor, — weakly frame,  
 With only woman's wit to make amends, —  
 When I shall die, or while I am alive,  
 Cannot you figure me an easy mark  
 For hypocritical rapacity, 600  
 Kith, kin and generation, couching low,  
 Ever on the alert to pounce on prey ?  
 Far be it I should say they profited  
 By that first frenzy-fit themselves induced, —  
 Cold-blooded scenical buffoons at sport  
 With horror and damnation o'er a grave :  
 That were too shocking — I absolve them there !  
 Nor did they seize the moment of your swoon  
 To rifle pocket, wring a paper thence,  
 Their Cousinly dictation, and enrich 610  
 Thereby each mother's son as heart could wish,  
 Had nobody supplied a codicil.  
 But when the pain, poor friend ! had prostrated  
 Your body, though your soul was right once more,  
 I fear they turned your weakness to account !  
 Why else to me, who agonizing watched,  
 Sneak, cap in hand, now bribe me to forsake  
 My maimed Léonce, now bully, cap on head,  
 The impudent pretension to assuage  
 Such sorrows as demanded Cousins' care ? — 620  
*For you rejected, hated, fled me, far*  
*In foreign lands you laughed at me ! — they judged.*  
 And, think you, will the unkind ones hesitate  
 To try conclusions with my helplessness, —  
 To pounce on and misuse your derelict,

Helped by advantage that bereavement lends  
Folk, who, while yet you lived, played tricks like  
these?

You only have to die, and they detect,  
In all you said and did, insanity!  
Your faith was fetish-worship, your regard 630  
For Christ's prime precept which endows the poor  
And strips the rich, a craze from first to last!  
They so would limn your likeness, paint your life,  
'That if it ended by some accident, —  
For instance, if, attempting to arrange  
The plants below that dangerous Belvedere  
I cannot warn you from sufficiently,  
You lost your balance and fell headlong — fine  
Occasion, such, for crying *Suicide!*

*Nim compos mentis*, naturally next, 640  
Hands over Clairvaux to a Cousin-tribe  
Who nor like me nor love The Ravissante :  
Therefore be ruled by both ! Life-interest  
In Clairvaux, — conservation, guardianship  
Of earthly good for heavenly purpose, — give  
Such and no other proof of confidence !  
Let Clara represent the Ravissante !'  
— To whom accordingly, he then and there  
Bequeathed each stick and stone, by testament  
In holograph, mouth managing the quill : 650  
Go, see the same in Londres, if you doubt !”

Then smile grew laugh, as sudden up she stood  
And out she spoke : intemperate the speech !  
“ And now, sirs, for your special courtesy,  
Your candie held up to the character  
Of Lucie Steiner, whom you qualify  
As coming short of perfect womanhood.

Yes, kindly critics, truth for once you tell !  
 True is it that through childhood, poverty,  
 Sloth, pressure of temptation, I succumbed, 660  
 And, ere I found what honor meant, lost mine.  
 So was the sheep lost, which the Shepherd found  
 And never lost again. My friend found me ;  
 Or better say, the Shepherd found us both —  
 Since he, my friend, was much in the same mire  
 When first we made acquaintance. Each helped each, —  
 A two-fold extrication from the slough ;  
 And, saving me, he saved himself. Since then,  
 Unsmirched we kept our cleanliness of coat.  
 It is his perfect constancy, you call 670  
 My friend's main fault — he never left his love !  
 While as for me, I dare your worst, impute  
 One breach of loving bond, these twenty years,  
 To me whom only cobwebs bound, you count !  
 ' He was religiously disposed in youth !'  
 That may be, though we did not meet at church.  
 Under my teaching did he, like you scamps,  
 Become Voltairian — fools who mock his faith ?  
 ' Infirm of body !' I am silent there :  
 Even yourselves acknowledge service done, 680  
 Whatever motive your own souls supply  
 As inspiration. Love made labor light."

Then laugh grew frown, and frown grew terrible.  
 Do recollect what sort of person shrieked —  
 " Such was I, saint or sinner, what you please :  
 And who is it casts stone at me but you ?  
 By your own showing, sirs, you bought and sold,  
 Took what advantage bargain promised bag,  
 Abundantly did business, and with whom ?  
 The man whom you pronounce imbecile, push 690



Indignantly aside if he presume  
 To settle his affairs like other folk !  
 How is it you have stepped into his shoes  
 And stand there, bold as brass, ' Miranda, late,  
 Now, Firm-Miranda' ? Sane, he signed away  
 That little birthright, did he ? Hence to trade !  
 I know and he knew who 't was dipped and ducked,  
 Truckled and played the parasite in vain,  
 As now one, now the other, here you cringed, 699  
 Were feasted, took our presents, you — those drops  
 Just for your wife's adornment ! you — that spray  
 Exactly suiting, as most diamonds would,  
 Your daughter on her marriage ! No word then  
 Of somebody the wanton ! Hence, I say,  
 Subscribers to the *Siècle*, every snob —  
 For here the post brings me the *Univers* !  
 Home and make money in the Place Vendôme,  
 Sully yourselves no longer by my sight,  
 And, when next Schneider wants a new *parure*,  
 Be careful lest you stick there by mischance 710  
 That stone beyond compare entrusted you  
 To kindle faith with, when, Miranda's gift,  
 Crowning the very crown, the Ravissante  
 Shall claim it ! As to Clairvaux — talk to Her !  
 She answers by the Chapter of Raimbaux ! ”  
 Vituperative, truly ! All this wrath  
 Because the man's relations thought him mad !  
 Whereat, I hope you see the Cousinry  
 Turn each to other, blankly dolorous,  
 Consult a moment, more by shrug and shrug 720  
 Than mere man's language, — finally conclude  
 To leave the reprobate untroubled now  
 In her unholy triumph, till the Law  
 Shall right the injured ones ; for gentlemen

Allow the female sex, this sort at least,  
 Its privilege. So, simply "Cockatrice!" —  
 "Jezebel!" — "Queen of the Camellias!" — cried  
 Cousin to cousin, as yon hinge a-creak  
 Shut out the party, and the gate returned  
 To custody of Clairvaux. "Pretty place! 730  
 What say you, when it proves our property,  
 To trying a concurrence with La Roche,  
 And laying down a rival oyster-bed?  
 Where the park ends, the sea begins, you know."  
 So took they comfort till they came to Vire.

But I would linger, fain to snatch a look  
 At Clara as she stands in pride of place,  
 Somewhat more satisfying than my glance  
 So furtive, so near futile, yesterday,  
 Because one must be courteous. Of the masks 740  
 That figure in this little history,  
 She only has a claim to my respect,  
 And one-eyed, in her French phrase, rules the blind.  
 Miranda hardly did his best with life:  
 He might have opened eye, exerted brain,  
 Attained conception as to right and law  
 In certain points respecting intercourse  
 Of man with woman — love, one likes to say;  
 Which knowledge had dealt rudely with the claim  
 Of Clara to play representative 750  
 And from perdition rescue soul, forsooth!  
 Also, the sense of him should have sufficed  
 For building up some better theory  
 Of how God operates in heaven and earth,  
 Than would establish Him participant  
 In doings yonder at the Ravissante.  
 The heart *was* wise according to its lights

124 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

And limits ; but the head refused more sun,  
 And shrank into its mew and craved less space.  
 Clara, I hold the happier specimen, — 760  
 It may be, through that artist-preference  
 For work complete, inferiorly proposed,  
 To incomplection, though it aim aright.  
 Morally, no ! Aspire, break bounds ! I say,  
 Endeavor to be good, and better still,  
 And best ! Success is naught, endeavor 's all.  
 But intellect adjusts the means to ends,  
 Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least ;  
 No prejudice to high thing, intellect  
 Would do and will do, only give the means. 770  
 Miranda, in my picture-gallery,  
 Presents a Blake ; be Clara — Meissonier !  
 Merely considered so by artist, mind !  
 For, break through Art and rise to poetry,  
 Being Art to tremble nearer, touch enough  
 The verge of vastness to inform our soul  
 What orb makes transit through the dark above,  
 And there 's the triumph ! — there the incomplete,  
 More than completion, matches the immense, —  
 Then, Michelagnolo against the world ! 780  
 With this proviso, let me study her  
 Approvingly, the finished little piece !  
 Born, bred, with just one instinct, — that of growth, —  
 Her quality was, caterpillar-like,  
 To all-unerringly select a leaf  
 And without intermission feed her fill,  
 Become the Painted-peacock, or belike  
 The Brimstone-wing, when time of year should suit ;  
 And 't is a sign (say entomologists)  
 Of sickness, when the creature stops its meal 790  
 One minute, either to look up at heaven,

Or turn aside for change of aliment.  
 No doubt there was a certain ugliness  
 In the beginning, as the grub grew worm :  
 She could not find the proper plant at once,  
 But crawled and fumbled through a whole parterre.  
 Husband Muhlhausen served for stuff not long :  
 Then came confusion of the slimy track  
 From London, " where she gave the tone awhile,"  
 To Paris : let the stalks start up again,                   800  
 Now she is off them, all the greener they !  
 But, settled on Miranda, how she sucked,  
 Assimilated juices, took the tint,  
 Mimicked the form and texture of her food !  
 Was he for pastime ? Who so frolic-fond  
 As Clara ? Had he a devotion-fit ?  
 Clara grew serious with like qualm, be sure !  
 In health and strength he, — healthy too and strong,  
 She danced, rode, drove, took pistol-practice, fished,  
 Nay, " managed sea-skiff with consummate skill." 810  
 In pain and weakness, he, — she patient watched  
 And wiled the slow drip-dropping hours away.  
 She bound again the broken self-respect,  
 She picked out the true meaning from mistake,  
 Praised effort in each stumble, laughed " Well-climbed !"  
 When others groaned " None ever grovelled so !"  
 " Rise, you have gained experience ! " was her word :  
 " Lie satisfied, the ground is just your place !"  
 They thought appropriate counsel. " Live, not die,  
 And take my full life to eke out your own :               820  
 That shall repay me and with interest !  
 Write ! — is your mouth not clever as my hand ?  
 Paint ! — the last Exposition warrants me,  
 Plenty of people must ply brush with toes.  
 And as for music — look, what folk nickname

126 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

A lyre, those ancients played to ravishment, —  
 Over the *pendule*, see, Apollo grasps  
 A three-stringed gimcrack which no Liszt could coax  
 Such music from as jew's-harp makes to-day !  
 Do your endeavor like a man, and leave 830  
 The rest to 'fortune who assists the bold' —  
 Learn, you, the Latin which you taught me first,  
 You clever creature — clever, yes, I say !”

If he smiled “ Let us love, love's wrong comes right,  
 Shows reason last of all ! Necessity  
 Must meanwhile serve for plea — so, mind not much  
 Old Fricquot's menace ! ” — back she smiled “ Who  
 minds ? ”

If he sighed “ Ah, but She is strict, they say,  
 For all Her mercy at the Ravissante,  
 She scarce will be put off so ! ” — straight a sigh 840  
 Returned “ My lace must go to trim Her gown ! ”  
 I nowise doubt she inwardly believed  
 Smiling and sighing had the same effect  
 Upon the venerated image. What  
 She did believe in, I as little doubt,  
 Was — Clara's self's own birthright to sustain  
 Existence, grow from grub to butterfly,  
 Upon unlimited Miranda-leaf ;  
 In which prime article of faith confirmed,  
 According to capacity, she fed 850  
 On and on till the leaf was eaten up  
 That April morning. Even then, I praise  
 Her forethought which prevented leafless stalk  
 Bestowing any hoarded succulence  
 On earwig and blackbeetle squat beneath  
 Clairvaux, that stalk whereto her hermitage  
 She tacked by golden throw of silk, so fine,

So anything but feeble, that her sleep  
 Inside it, through last winter, two years long,  
 Recked little of the storm and strife without. 860  
 "But—loved him?" Friend, I do not praise her  
 love!

True love works never for the loved one so,  
 Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.  
 Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace  
 Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.  
 "Worship not me but God!" the angels urge:  
 That is love's grandeur; still, in pettier love  
 The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.  
 Shall mine degrade the velvet green and puce  
 Of caterpillar, palmer-worm — or what — 870  
 Ball in and out of ball, each ball with brush  
 Of Venus' eye-fringe round the turquoise egg  
 That nestles soft, — compare such paragon  
 With any scarabæus of the brood  
 Which, born to fly, keeps wing in wing-case, walks  
 Persistently a-trundling dung on earth?  
 Egypt may venerate such hierophants,  
 Not I — the couple yonder, Father Priest  
 And Mother Nun, who came and went and came,  
 Beset this Clairvaux, trundled money-muck 880  
 To midden and the main heap oft enough,  
 But never bade unshut from sheath the gauze,  
 Nor showed that, who would fly, must let fall filth,  
 And warn "Your jewel, brother, is a blotch:  
 Sister, your lace trails ordure! Leave your sins,  
 And so best gift with Crown and grace with Robe!"

The superstition is extinct, you hope?  
 It were, with my good will! Suppose it so,  
 Bethink you likewise of the latest use

128 RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY,

Whereto a Night-cap is convertible, 890  
And draw your very thickest, thread and thrum,  
O'er such a decomposing face of things,  
Once so alive, it seemed immortal too !

This happened two years since. The Cousinry  
Returned to Paris, called in help from Law,  
And in due form proceeded to dispute  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's competence,  
Being insane, to make a valid Will.

Much testimony volunteered itself ;  
The issue hardly could be doubtful — but 900  
For that sad 'Seventy which must intervene,  
Provide poor France with other work to mind  
Than settling lawsuits, even for the sake  
Of such a party as the Ravissante.  
It only was this Summer that the case  
Could come and be disposed of, two weeks since,  
At Vire — Tribunal Civil.— Chamber First.

Here, issued with all regularity,  
I hold the judgment — just, inevitable,  
Nowise to be contested by what few 910  
Can judge the judges ; sum and substance, thus —

“ Inasmuch as we find, the Cousinry,  
During that very period when they take  
Monsieur Léonce Miranda for stark mad,  
Considered him to be quite sane enough  
For doing much important business with —  
Nor showed suspicion of his competence  
Until, by turning of the tables, loss  
Instead of gain accrued to them thereby, —  
Plea of incompetence we set aside. 920

— “The rather, that the dispositions, sought  
 To be impugned, are natural and right,  
 Nor jar with any reasonable claim  
 Of kindred, friendship or acquaintance here.  
 Nobody is despoiled, none overlooked ;  
 Since the testator leaves his property  
 To just that person whom, of all the world,  
 He counted he was most indebted to.  
 In mere discharge, then, of conspicuous debt,  
 Madame Muhlhausen has priority,  
 Enjoys the usufruct of Clairvaux.

930

“ Next,  
 Such debt discharged, such life determining,  
 Such earthly interest provided for,  
 Monsieur Léonce Miranda may bequeath,  
 In absence of more fit recipient, fund  
 And usufruct together to the Church  
 Whereof he was a special devotee.

“ — Which disposition, being consonant  
 With a long series of such acts and deeds  
 Notorious in his life-time, needs must stand,  
 Unprejudiced by eccentricity  
 Nowise amounting to distemper : since,  
 In every instance signalized as such,  
 We recognize no overleaping bounds,  
 No straying out of the permissible :  
 Duty to the Religion of the Land, —  
 Neither excessive nor inordinate.

940

“ The minor accusations are dismissed ;  
 They prove mere freak and fancy, boyish mood  
 In age *mature of simple kindly man.*

950



Exuberant in generousities  
 To all the world : no fact confirms the fear  
 He meditated mischief to himself  
 That morning when he met the accident  
 Which ended fatally. The case is closed."

How otherwise ? So, when I grazed the skirts,  
 And had the glimpse of who made, yesterday, —  
 Woman and retinue of goats and sheep, —  
 The sombre path one whiteness, vision-like,  
 As out of gate, and in at gate again, 960  
 They wavered, — she was lady there for life :  
 And, after life — I hope, a white success  
 Of some sort, wheresoever life resume  
 School interrupted by vacation — death ;  
 Seeing that home she goes with prize in hand,  
 Confirmed the Châtelaine of Clairvaux.

True,

Such prize fades soon to insignificance.  
 Though she have eaten her Miranda up,  
 And spun a cradle-cone through which she pricks  
 Her passage, and proves Peacock-butterfly 970  
 This Autumn — wait a little week of cold !  
 Peacock and death's-head-moth end much the same.  
 And could she still continue spinning, — sure,  
 Cradle would soon crave shroud for substitute,  
 And o'er this life of hers distaste would drop  
 Red-cotton-Night-cap-wise.

---

How say you, friend ?

Have I redeemed my promise ? Smile assent  
 Through the dark Winter-gloom between us both !  
 Already, months ago and miles away,

I just as good as told you, in a flash, 980  
 The while we paced the sands before my house,  
 All this poor story — truth and nothing else.  
 Accept that moment's flashing, amplified,  
 Impalpability reduced to speech,  
 Conception proved by birth, — no other change!  
 Can what Saint-Rambert flashed me in a thought,  
 Good gloomy London make a poem of?  
 Such ought to be whatever dares precede,  
 Play ruddy herald-star to your white blaze  
 About to bring us day. How fail imbibe 990  
 Some foretaste of effulgence? Sun shall wax,  
 And star shall wane: what matter, so star tell  
 The drowsy world to start awake, rub eyes,  
 And stand all ready for morn's joy a-blush?

*January 23, 1873.*

# THE INN ALBUM.

1875.

## I.

“THAT oblong book’s the Album ; hand it here !  
Exactly ! page on page of gratitude  
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view !  
I praise these poets : they leave margin-space ;  
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,  
And primly, trimly, keep the foot’s confine,  
Modest and maidlike ; lubber prose o’ersprawls  
And straddling stops the path from left to right.  
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,  
Which poem spares a corner ? What comes first ? 10  
*‘ Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot ! ’*  
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy !)  
Or see — succincter beauty, brief and bold —  
*‘ If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine,  
He needs not despair Of dining well here — ’*  
*‘ Here ! ’* I myself could find a better rhyme !  
That bard’s a Browning ; he neglects the form :  
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense !  
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide !  
I’ll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt. 20  
A minute’s fresh air, then to cipher-work !  
Three little columns hold the whole account :  
*Ecarté*, after which Blind Hookey, then  
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.  
‘T is easy reckoning : I have lost, I think.”

Two personages occupy this room  
Shabby-genteel, that’s parlor to the inn

18  
—  
W  
T  
A  
1

Perched on a view-commanding eminence ;  
 — Inn which may be a veritable house  
 Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste 30  
 Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,  
 And fingered blunt the individual mark  
 And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.  
 On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays  
 Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag ;  
 His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds ;  
 They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.  
 Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,  
 Varnished and confined, *Salmo ferox* glares  
 — Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed 40  
 And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room —  
 Vulgar flat smooth respectability :  
 Not so the burst of landscape surging in,  
 Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair  
 Is, plain enough, the younger personage  
 Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft  
 The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall  
 Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.  
 He leans into a living glory-bath 50  
 Of air and light where seems to float and move  
 The wooded watered country, hill and dale  
 And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,  
 A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift  
 O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed  
 patch  
 Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close  
 For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,  
 This inn is perched above to dominate —  
 Except such sign of human neighborhood,

(And this surmised rather than sensible) 60  
 There 's nothing to disturb absolute peace,  
 The reign of English nature — which means art  
 And civilized existence. Wildness' self  
 Is just the cultured triumph. Presently  
 Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place  
 That knows the right way to defend itself :  
 Silence heins round a burning spot of life.  
 Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,  
 And where a village broods, an inn should boast —  
 Close and convenient : here you have them both. 70  
 This inn, the Something-arms — the family's —  
 (Don't trouble Guillim : heralds leave out half !)  
 Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,  
 And epics have been planned here ; but who plan  
 Take holy orders and find work to do.  
 Painters are more productive, stop a week,  
 Declare the prospect quite a Corot, — ay,  
 For tender sentiment, — themselves incline  
 Rather to handsweep large and liberal ;  
 Then go, but not without success achieved 80  
 — Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,  
 Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,  
 On this a slug, on that a butterfly.  
 Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,  
 Also exhibited, this same May-month,  
 " *Foxgloves : a study* " — so inspires the scene,  
 The air, which now the younger personage  
 Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain  
 Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir  
 Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South 90  
 I' the distance where the green dies off to gray,  
 Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place ;  
 He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

His fellow, the much older — either say  
 A youngish-old man or man oldish-young —  
 Sits at the table : wicks are noisome-deep  
 In wax, to detriment of plated ware ;  
 Above — piled, strewn — is store of playing-cards,  
 Counters and all that 's proper for a game.  
 He sets down, rubs out figures in the book, 100  
 Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,  
 Until the summed-up satisfaction stands  
 Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work :  
 Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,  
 By passage of the hard palm, curing so  
 Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space ;  
 Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,  
 Such the sum-total — ask Colenso else !

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too —  
 The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps. 110

“ Well, what 's the damage — three, or four, or  
 five ?

How many figures in a row ! Hand here !  
 Come now, there 's one expense all yours not mine —  
 Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf  
 The first and foremost too ! You think, perhaps,  
 They 'll only charge you for a brand-new book  
 Nor estimate the literary loss ?  
 Wait till the small account comes ! ‘ *To one night's  
 Lodging,* ’ — for ‘ beds, ’ they can't say, — ‘ *pound or so ;  
 Dinner, Apollinaris, — what they please,* 120  
*Attendance not included ;* ’ last looms large  
 ‘ *Defacement of our Album, late enriched  
 With* ’ — let 's see what ! Here, at the window,  
 though !

Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck !  
 Fine enough country for a fool like me  
 To own, as next month I suppose I shall !  
 Eh ? True fool's-fortune ! so console yourself.  
 Let's see, however — hand the book, I say !  
 Well, you've improved the classic by romance.  
 Queer reading ! Verse with parenthetic prose 130  
 ' *Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !*  
 (Three-two fives) ' *life how profitably spent*  
 (Five-naught, five-nine fives) ' *yonder bumble cot,*  
 (More and more naughts and fives) ' *in mild content ;*  
*And did my feelings find the natural vent*  
*In friendship and in love, how blest my lot !*  
 Then follow the dread figures — five ! ' *Content !*  
 That's apposite ! Are you content as he —  
 Simpkin the sonneteer ? *Ten thousand pounds*  
 Give point to his effusion — by so much 140  
 Leave me the richer and the poorer you  
 After our night's play ; who's content the most,  
 I, you, or Simpkin ? "

So the polished snob.

The elder man, refinement every inch  
 From brow to boot-end, quietly replies :

" Simpkin's no name I know. I had my whim."

" Ay, had you ! And such things make friendship  
 thick.

Intimates I may boast we were ; henceforth,  
 Friends — shall it not be ? — who discard reserve,  
 Use plain words, put each dot upon each i, 150  
 Till death us twain do part ? The bargain's struck !  
 Old fellow, if you fancy — (to begin — )  
*I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,*

You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs !  
 Because you happen to be twice my age  
 And twenty times my master, must perforce  
 No blink of daylight struggle through the web  
 There's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,  
 And welcome, for I like it : blind me, — no !  
 A very pretty piece of shuttle-work 160  
 Was that — your mere chance question at the club —  
 ' Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide ?  
 I'm off for Paris, there's the Opera — there's  
 The Salon, there's a china-sale, — beside  
 Chantilly ; and, for good companionship,  
 There's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose  
 We start together ? ' ' No such holiday ! '  
 I told you : ' Paris and the rest be hanged !  
 Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights ? 169  
 I'm the engaged now ; through whose fault but yours ?  
 On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse  
 The week away down with the Aunt and Niece ?  
 No help : it's leisure, loneliness and love.  
 Wish I could take you ; but fame travels fast, ' —  
 A man of much newspaper-paragraph,  
 You scare domestic circles ; and beside  
 Would not you like your lot, that second taste  
 Of nature and approval of the grounds !  
 You might walk early or lie late, so shirk  
 Week-day devotions : but stay Sunday o'er, 180  
 And morning church is obligatory :  
 No mundane garb permissible, or dread  
 The butler's privileged monition ! No !  
 Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away ! '  
 Whereon how artlessly the happy flash  
 Followed, by inspiration ! ' Tell you what —  
 Let's turn their flank, try things on t' other side !



*Inns for my money! Liberty's the life!*  
*We'll lie in hiding: there's the crow-nest nook,*  
*The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,* 19c  
*Inn that's out — out of sight and out of mind*  
*And out of mischief to all four of us —*  
*Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive;*  
*At morn, find time for just a Pisgab-view*  
*Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart.*  
*And while I'm whizzing onward by first train,*  
*Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks*  
*And says I shun him like the plague) yourself —*  
*Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay*  
*Despite the sleepless journey, — love lends wings, —*  
*Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait* 201  
*The faithful advent! Eh?' 'With all my heart,'*  
*Said I to you; said I to mine own self:*  
*'Does he believe I fail to comprehend*  
*He wants just one more final friendly snack*  
*At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,*  
*Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'*  
*And did I spoil sport, pull face grim, — ray, grave?*  
*Your pupil does you better credit! No!*  
*I parleyed with my pass-book, — rubbed my pair* 210  
*At the big balance in my banker's hands, —*  
*Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape, — just wants*  
*Filling and signing, — and took train, resolved*  
*To execute myself with decency*  
*And let you win — if not Ten thousand quite,*  
*Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst*  
*Of firework-nosegay! Where's your fortune fled?*  
*Or is not fortune constant after all?*  
*You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half*  
*Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think.* 220  
*You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best*

On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.  
How does the loss feel! Just one lesson more!"

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be — only boys like you  
Put such a question at the present stage.  
I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,  
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact;  
Next day, I felt decidedly: and still,  
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm 230  
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.  
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck!  
And meantime please to stop impertinence,  
For — don't I know its object? All this chaff  
Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech,  
This boy stands forth a hero. *'There, my lord!*  
*Our play was true play, fun not earnest! I*  
*Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke*  
*Bulges to bursting? You can badly spare*  
*A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be! 240*  
*While I'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop*  
*And show my father's warehouse-apron: pshaw!*  
*Enough! We've had a palpitating night!*  
*Good morning! Breakfast and forget our dreams!*  
*My mouth's shut, mind! I tell nor man nor mouse.'*  
There, see! He don't deny it! Thanks, my boy!  
Hero and welcome — only, not on me  
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand! Enough!  
We've played, I've lost and owe ten thousand pounds,  
Whereof I muster, at the moment, — well, 250  
What's for the bill here and the back to town.  
Still, I've my little character to keep:  
You may expect your money at month's end."  
The young man at the window turns round quick —

A clumsy giant handsome creature ; grasps  
 In his large red the little lean white hand  
 Of the other, looks him in the fallow face.

“ I say now — is it right to so mistake  
 A fellow, force him in mere self-defence  
 To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity* 260  
 In album-language ? You know well enough  
 Whether I like you — *like* ’s no album-word  
 Anyhow : point me to one soul beside  
 In the wide world I care one straw about !  
 I first set eyes on you a year ago ;  
 Since when you ’ve done me good — I ’ll stick to it —  
 More than I got in the whole twenty-five  
 That make my life up, Oxford years and all —  
 Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,  
 Seeing myself and nobody more sage 270  
 Until I met you, and you made me man  
 Such as the sort is and the fates allow.  
 I do think, since we two kept company,  
 I ’ve learnt to know a little — all through you !  
 It ’s nature if I like you. Taunt away !  
 As if I need you teaching me my place —  
 The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,  
 When just the good you did was — teaching me  
 My own trade, how a snob and millionaire  
 May lead his life and let the Duke’s alone, 28c  
 Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,  
 Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,  
 Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut  
 Regular peacocks who can’t fly an inch  
 Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart  
 (That ’s album-style) are older than you know,  
 For all your knowledge : boy, perhaps — ay, boy

Had his adventure, just as he were man —  
 His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,  
 His bit of life-long ache to recognize, 290  
 Although he bears it cheerily about,  
 Because you came and clapped him on the back,  
 Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'  
 Why, I was minded to sit down for life  
 Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower  
 High on a rock, and so expend my days  
 Pursuing chemistry or botany  
 Or, very like, astronomy because  
 I noticed stars shone when I passed the place :  
 Letting my cash accumulate the while 300  
 In England — to lay out in lump at last  
 As Ruskin should direct me ! All or some  
 Of which should I have done or tried to do,  
 And preciously repented, one fine day,  
 Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock  
 And scaled his tower, some ten years thence, suppose,  
 And coaxed his story from him ! Don't I see  
 The pair conversing ! It's a novel writ  
 Already, I'll be bound, — our dialogue !  
 '*What?*' cried the elder and yet youthful man — 310  
 So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,  
 And the imposing presence swell with scorn,  
 As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose  
 Contrasted with his interlocutor  
 The stabby low-born who, of bulk before,  
 Had steadily increased, one stone per week,  
 Since his abstention from horse-exercise : —  
 '*What?* you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,  
 London the very year you came of age,  
 Because your father manufactured goods — 320  
 Commission-agent bight of Manchester —

*Partly, and partly through a baby case  
Of disappointment I've pumped out at last —  
And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh  
And giving science one more asteroid ?*

Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,  
At Alfred's and not Istria ! proved a snob  
May turn a million to account although  
His brother be no Duke, and see good days  
Without the girl he lost and some one gained. 330

The end is, after one year's tutelage,  
Having, by your help, touched society,  
Polo, Tent-pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink —  
I leave all these delights, by your advice,  
And marry my young pretty cousin here  
Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.

(Her father was in partnership with mine —  
Does not his purchase look a pedigree ?)  
My million will be tails and tassels smart  
To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land 340

Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,  
Along life's pleasant meadow, — arm left free  
To lock a friend's in, — whose but yours, old boy ?  
Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,  
While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards.

Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds  
(— Which I shall probably discover snug  
Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped  
With 'Credit,' based on 'Balance,' — which, I swear,  
By this time next month I shall quite forget 350

Whether I lost or won — ten thousand pounds,  
Which at this instant I would give . . . let's see,  
For Galopin — nay, for that Gainsborough  
Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,  
Would get my glance and praise some twice a year, —)

Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap  
 For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake —  
 Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,  
 My one discovered phoenix proves a goose,  
 My cleverest of all companions — oh, 36c  
 Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!  
 Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here  
 The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts  
 Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!  
 To bed — I can't say, since you needs must start  
 For station early — oh, the down-train still,  
 First plan and best plan — townward trip be hanged!  
 You're due at your big brother's — pay that debt,  
 Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs —  
 And who knows but there's trout obtainable?" 37c

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then —

“Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:  
 I pay mine — debts of this sort — certainly.  
 What do I care how you regard your gains,  
 Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want  
 Is — not to have a story circulate  
 From club to club — how, bent on clearing out  
 Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,  
 Then set the empty kennel flush again,  
 Ignored advantage and forgave his friend — 38c  
 For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!  
 Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,  
 Bite it in two, as man may; but those small  
 Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt  
 Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,  
 And the thinned company consists of six  
*Capital well-known fellows one may trust!*

Next week, it's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.  
I owe ten thousand pounds: I'll pay them!"

"Now, —

This becomes funny. You've made friends with me:  
I can't help knowing of the ways and means! 391  
Or stay! they say your brother closets up  
Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means  
To give you that, and if you give it me . . . "

"I polished snob off to aristocrat?  
You compliment me! father's apron still  
Sticks out from son's court-vesture: still silk purse  
Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!  
Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!  
I owe you and shall pay you: which promised, 400  
Why should what follows sound like flattery?  
The fact is — you do compliment too much  
Your humble master, as I own I am;  
You owe me no such thanks as you protest.  
The polisher needs precious stone no less  
Than precious stone needs polisher: believe  
I struck no tint from out you but I found  
Snug lying first 'neath surface hair-breadth-deep!  
Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill  
Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see, 410  
I'm old and understand things: too absurd  
It were you pitched and tossed away your life,  
As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,  
That I myself misused a stone of price.  
Born and bred clever — people used to say  
Clever as most men, if not something more —  
Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry  
Or left opaque, — no brilliant named and known.

Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside's blank :  
 I'm nobody — or rather, look that same — 420  
 I'm — who I am — and know it ; but I hold  
*What* in my hand out for the world to see ?  
 What ministry, what mission, or what book  
 — I'll say, book even ? Not a sign of these !  
 I began — laughing — '*All these when I like !*'  
 I end with — well, you've hit it ! — '*This boy's cheque*  
*For just as many thousands as he'll spare !*'  
 The first — I could, and would not ; your spare cash  
 I would, and could not : have no scruple, pray,  
 But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine 430  
 — When you are able ! "

“ Which is — when to be ?

I've heard, great characters require a fall  
 Of fortune to show greatness by uprise :  
*They touch the ground to jollily rebound,*  
 Add to the Album ! Let a fellow share  
 Your secret of superiority !  
 I know, my banker makes the money breed  
 Money ; I eat and sleep, he simply takes  
 The dividends and cuts the coupons off,  
 Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash, 440  
 While I do nothing but receive and spend.  
 But you, spontaneous generator, hatch  
 A wind-egg ; cluck, and forth struts Capital  
 As Interest to me from egg of gold.  
 I am grown curious : pay me by all means !  
 How will you make the money ? "

“ Mind your own —

Not my affair. Enough : or money, or  
 Money's worth, as the case may be, expect  
 Ere month's end, — keep but patient for a month !  
 Who's for a stroll to station ? Ten's the time : 450



Your man, with my things, follow in the trap ;  
 At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived  
 On platform, and you 'll show the due fatigue  
 Of the night-journey, — not much sleep, — perhaps  
 Your thoughts were on before you — yes, indeed,  
 You join them, being happily awake  
 With thought's sole object as she smiling sits  
 At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime  
 In and out station-precinct, wile away  
 The hour till up my engine pants and smokes. 460  
 No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear !  
 She gets no glance at me, who shame such saints ! ”

## II.

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart  
 Amid profuse acknowledgment from host  
 Who well knows what may bring the younger back.  
 They light cigar, descend in twenty steps  
 The “ *calm acclivity*,” inhale — beyond  
 Tobacco's balm — the better smoke of turf  
 And wood fire, — cottages at cookery  
 I' the morning, — reach the main road straitening on  
 'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night  
 Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before 10  
 The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine  
 Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently  
 The road's end with the sky's beginning mix  
 In one magnificence of glare, due East,  
 So high the sun rides, — May 's the merry month.  
 They slacken pace : the younger stops abrupt,  
 Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.  
 “ All right ; the station comes in view at end ;  
*Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are !*

I say : let 's halt, let 's borrow yonder gate      20  
 Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk !  
 Do let a fellow speak a moment ! More  
 I think about and less I like the thing —  
 No, you must let me ! Now, be good for once !  
 Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned !  
 We played for love, not hate : yes, hate ! I hate  
 Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce  
 To strychnine some poor devil of a lord  
 Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash  
 To lose — you knew that ! — lose and none the less 30  
 Whistle to-morrow : it 's not every chap  
 Affords to take his punishment so well !  
 Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault  
 Is that he thinks — upon my soul, I do —  
 Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees  
 Names in the newspaper — great this, great that,  
 Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate : — much I care !  
 Others have their opinion, I keep mine :  
 Which means — by right you ought to have the things  
 I want a head for. Here 's a pretty place,      40  
 My cousin's place, and presently my place,  
 Not yours ! I 'll tell you how it strikes a man.  
 My cousin's fond of music and of course  
 Plays the piano (it won't be for long !)  
 A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,'  
 Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,  
 And cost no end of money. Twice a week  
 Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,  
 Sets to work teaching — with his teeth on edge — 49  
 I 've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate ?*'  
 I ask : '*I rather think so,*' answers she —  
 '*He 's What 's-bis-Name !*' — '*Why give you lessons*  
*then ?*' —

' I pay three guineas and the train beside.' —  
 ' This instrument, has he one such at home ?' —  
 ' He ? Has to practise on a table-top,  
 When he can't hire the proper thing.' — ' I see !  
 You've the piano, he the skill, and God  
 The distribution of such gifts.' So here :  
 After your teaching, I shall sit and strum  
 Polkas on this piano of a Place 6a  
 You'd make resound with *Rule Britannia!*''

" Thanks !

I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,  
 Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand  
 As key-board I might touch with some effect."

" Then, why not have obtained the like ? House,  
 land,

Money, are things obtainable, you see,  
 By clever head-work : ask my father else !  
 You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself ?  
 Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump  
 And flourish and the rest, not bend demure 70  
 Pointing out blunders — ' Sharp, not natural !  
 Permit me — on the black key use the thumb !'

There's some fatality, I'm sure ! You say  
 ' Marry the cousin, that's your proper move !'  
 And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp :  
 You should have listened to your own head's hint,  
 As I to you ! The puzzle's past my power,  
 How you have managed — with such stuff, such  
 means —

Not to be rich nor great nor happy man :  
 Of which three good things where's a sign at all ? 80  
 Just look at Dizzy ! Come. — what tripped your  
*heels ?*

Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!  
 I wager I have guessed it! — never found.  
 The old solution of the riddle fail!  
 'Who was the woman?' I don't ask, but — 'Where  
 I' the path of life stood she who tripped you?'"

“Goose

You truly are! I own to fifty years.  
 Why don't I interpose and cut out — you?  
 Compete with five-and-twenty? Age, my boy!"

“Old man, no nonsense! — even to a boy 90  
 That's ripe at least for rationality  
 Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!  
 I've had my small adventure lesson me  
 Over the knuckles! — likely, I forget  
 The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,  
 Competing with old shoulders but young head  
 Despite the fifty grizzling years!"

“Aha?

Then that means — just the bullet in the blade  
 Which brought Dalmatia on the brain, — that, too,  
 Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend 100  
 Now for the first time to surmise as much!  
 Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret's safe  
 'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

“— Can't pretend,  
 Neither, to never have surmised your wish!  
 It's no use, — case of unextracted ball —  
 Winces at finger-touching. Let things be!"

“Ah, if you love your love still! I hate mine.”

“I can't hate.”

“ I won’t teach you ; and won’t te  
 You, therefore, what you please to ask of me :  
 As if I, also, may not have my ache ! ” 11

“ My sort of ache ? No, no ! and yet — perhaps !  
 All comes of thinking you superior still.  
 But live and learn ! I say ! Time ’s up ! God  
 jump !  
 You old, indeed ! I fancy there ’s a cut  
 Across the wood, a grass path : shall we try ?  
 It ’s venturesome, however ! ”

“ Stop, my boy !  
 Don’t think I ’m stingy of experience ! Life  
 — It ’s like this wood we leave. Should you and I  
 Go wandering about there, though the gaps  
 We went in and came out by were opposed 12  
 As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,  
 By nightfall we should probably have chanced  
 On much the same main points of interest —  
 Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,  
 Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands  
 At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,  
 And so forth, — never mind what time betwixt.  
 So in our lives ; allow I entered mine  
 Another way than you : ’t is possible  
 I ended just by knocking head against 13  
 That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began  
 By getting bump from ; as at last you too  
 May stumble o’er that stump which first of all  
 Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet  
 Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,  
 Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.  
 I, *early* old, played young man four years since

And failed confoundedly : so, hate alike  
Failure and who caused failure, — curse her cant !”

“ Oh, I see ! You, though somewhat past the prime,  
Were taken with a rosebud beauty ! Ah — 141  
But how should chits distinguish ? She admired  
Your marvel of a mind, I ’ll undertake !  
But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,  
When years have told on face and figure . . . ”

“ Thanks,

*Mister Sufficiently-Instructed !* Such  
No doubt was bound to be the consequence  
To suit your self-complacency : she liked  
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath  
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top 150  
After my young friend’s fashion ! What becomes  
Of that fine speech you made a minute since  
About the man of middle age you found  
A formidable peer at twenty-one ?  
So much for your mock-modesty ! and yet  
I back your first against this second sprout  
Of observation, insight, what you please.  
My middle age, Sir, had too much success !  
It’s odd : my case occurred four years ago —  
I finished just while you commenced that turn 160  
I’ the wood of life that takes us to the wealth  
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.  
Now, I don’t boast : it’s bad style, and beside,  
The feat proves easier than it looks : I plucked  
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet  
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though !)  
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.  
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff

Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced 169  
 On what — so far from ‘*rosebud beauty*’ . . . Well —  
 She’s dead : at least you never heard her name ;  
 She was no courtly creature, had nor birth  
 Nor breeding — mere fine-lady-breeding ; but  
 Oh, such a wonder of a woman ! Grand  
 As a Greek statue ! Stick fine clothes on that,  
 Style that a Duchess or a Queen, — you know,  
 Artists would make an outcry : all the more,  
 That she had just a statue’s sleepy grace  
 Which broods o’er its own beauty. Nay, her fault  
 (Don’t laugh !) was just perfection : for suppose 180  
 Only the little flaw, and I had peeped  
 Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.  
 At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath  
 A Venus’ forehead with his whittling-knife —  
 I wish, — now, — I had played that brute, brought  
     blood  
 To surface from the depths I fancied chalk !  
 As it was, her mere face surprised so much  
 That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as stares  
 The cockney stranger at a certain bust 189  
 With drooped eyes, — she’s the thing I have in mind, —  
 Down at my Brother’s. All sufficient prize —  
 Such outside ! Now, — confound me for a prig ! —  
 Who cares ? I’ll make a clean breast once for all !  
 Beside, you’ve heard the gossip. My life long  
 I’ve been a woman-liker, — liking means  
 Loving and so on. There’s a lengthy list  
 By this time I shall have to answer for —  
 So say the good folk : and they don’t guess half —  
 For the worst is, let once collecting-itch  
 Possess you, and, with perspicacity, 200  
*Keeps growing such a greediness that theft*

Follows at no long distance, — there's the fact!  
 I knew that on my Leporello-list  
 Might figure this, that, and the other name  
 Of feminine desirability,  
 But if I happened to desire inscribe,  
 Along with these, the only Beautiful —  
 Here was the unique specimen to snatch  
 Or now or never. 'Beautiful' I said —  
 'Beautiful' say in cold blood, — boiling then   210  
 To tune of '*Haste, secure whate'er the cost*  
*T'bis rarity, die in the act, be damned,*  
*So you complete collection, crown your list!*'  
 It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused  
 By the first notice of such wonder's birth,  
 Would break bounds to contest my prize with me  
 The first discoverer, should she but emerge  
 From that safe den of darkness where she dozed  
 Till I stole in, that country-parsonage  
 Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless,   220  
 Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years  
 She had been vegetating lily-like.  
 Her father was my brother's tutor, got  
 The living that way: him I chanced to see —  
 Her I saw — her the world would grow one eye  
 To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!  
 'Secure her!' cried the devil: '*afterward*  
*Arrange for the disposal of the prize!*'  
 The devil's doing! yet I seem to think —   229  
 Now, when all's done, — think with '*a bead reposed*'  
 In French phrase — hope I think I meant to do  
 Ail requisite for such a rarity  
 When I should be at leisure, have due time  
 To learn requirement. But in evil day —  
 Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,



The father must begin ‘ *Young Somebody,*  
*Much recommended — for I break a rule —*  
*Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.*’ ‘ *Young!*  
 That did it. Had the epithet been ‘ *rich,*’  
 ‘ *Noble,*’ ‘ *a genius,*’ even ‘ *handsome,*’ — but  
 — ‘ *Young!* ’”

240

“ I say — just a word ! I want to know —  
 You are not married ? ”

“ I ? ”

“ Nor ever were ? ”

“ Never ! Why ? ”

“ Oh, then — never mind ! Go on !  
 I had a reason for the question. ”

“ Come, —  
 You could not be the young man ? ”

“ No, indeed !  
 Certainly — if you never married her ! ”

“ That I did not : and there’s the curse, you’ll see !  
 Nay, all of it’s one curse, my life’s mistake  
 Which, nourished with manure that’s warranted  
 To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full 25c  
 In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness !  
 The lies I used to tell my womankind,  
 Knowing they disbelieved me all the time  
 Though they required my lies, their decent due,  
 This woman — not so much believed, I’ll say,  
 As just anticipated from my mouth :  
 Since being true, devoted, constant — she

Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain  
 And easy commonplace of character.  
 No mock-heroics but seemed natural 260  
 To her who underneath the face, I knew  
 Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged  
 Must correspond in folly just as far  
 Beyond the common, — and a mind to match, —  
 Not made to puzzle conjurers like me  
 Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,  
 And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest !  
 ' *Trust me !* ' I said : she trusted. ' *Marry me !* '  
 Or rather, ' *We are married : when, the rite ?* '  
 That brought on the collector's next-day qualm 270  
 At counting acquisition's cost. There lay  
 My marvel, there my purse more light by much  
 Because of its late lie-expenditure :  
 Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand —  
 To cage as well as catch my rarity !  
 So, I began explaining. At first word  
 Outbroke the horror. ' *Then, my truths were lies !* '  
 I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange  
 All-unsuspected revelation — soul  
 As supernaturally grand as face 280  
 Was fair beyond example — that at once  
 Either I lost — or, if it please you, found  
 My senses, — stammered somehow — ' *Jest ! and now,  
 Earnest ! Forget all else but — heart has loved,  
 Does love, shall love you ever ! take the band !* '  
 Not she ! no marriage for superb disdain,  
 Contempt incarnate ! ”

“ Yes, it 's different, —  
 It 's only like in being four years since.  
 I see now ! ”

“ Well, what did disdain do next,  
Think you ? ”

“ That ’s past me : did not marry you ! —  
That ’s the main thing I care for, I suppose. 291  
Turned nun, or what ? ”

“ Why, married in a month  
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-chinned  
sort

Of curate-creature, I suspect, — dived down,  
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else —  
I don’t know where — I ’ve not tried much to know, —  
In short, she ’s happy : what the clodpoles call  
‘ Countrified ’ with a vengeance ! leads the life  
Respectable and all that drives you mad : 299  
Still — where, I don’t know, and that ’s best for both.”

“ Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.  
But why should you hate her, I want to know ? ”

“ My good young friend, — because or her or else  
Malicious Providence I have to hate.  
For, what I tell you proved the turning-point  
Of my whole life and fortune toward success  
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault  
Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,  
But more on reed which, with a packthread’s pith,  
Had buoyed me till the minute’s cramp could thaw 310  
And I strike out afresh and so be saved.  
It ’s easy saying — I had sunk before,  
Disqualified myself by idle days  
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard  
On cable, even, had fate cast me such !  
You boys don’t know how many times men fail

Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,  
 Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,  
 Collect the whole power for the final pounce.  
 My fault was the mistaking man's main prize 320  
 For intermediate boy's diversion ; clap  
 Of boyish hands here frightened game away  
 Which, once gone, goes forever. Oh, at first  
 I took the anger easily, nor much  
 Minded the anguish — having learned that storms  
 Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.  
 Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be  
 Somewhat amiss ; precipitation, eh ?  
 Reason and rhyme prompt — reparation ! Time  
 End properly in marriage and a dance !  
 I said ' We 'll marry, make the past a blank ' — 330  
 And never was such damnable mistake !  
 That interview, that laying bare my soul,  
 As it was first, so was it last chance — one  
 And only. Did I write ? Back letter came  
 Unopened as it went. Inexorable  
 She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself  
 With the smug curate-creature : chop and change  
 Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all  
 His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,  
 Forgiveness evangelically shown,  
 ' Loose hair and lifted eye,' — as some one said  
 And now, he 's worshipped for his pains, the next.

" Well, but your turning-point of life, — what year  
 To hinder you contesting Finsbury  
 With Orton, next election ? I don't see . . .

" Not you ! I see. Slowly, surely, surely  
 by day, the conviction — here.

Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go !  
 — That with her — may be, for her — I had felt 350  
 Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect  
 Any or all the fancies sluggish here  
 I' the head that needs the hand she would not take  
 And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood —  
 Its turnings which I likened life to ! Well, —  
 There she stands, ending every avenue,  
 Her visionary presence on each goal  
 I might have gained had we kept side by side !  
 Still string nerve and strike foot ? Her frown forbids :  
 The steam congeals once more : I'm old again ! 360  
 Therefore I hate myself — but how much worse  
 Do not I hate who would not understand,  
 Let me repair things — no, but sent a-slide  
 My folly falteringly, stumblingly  
 Down, down and deeper down until I drop  
 Upon — the need of your ten thousand pounds  
 And consequently loss of mine ! I lose  
 Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself  
 Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull  
 Adventure — lose my temper in the act . . ." 370

" And lose beside, — if I may supplement  
 The list of losses, — train and ten-o'clock !  
 Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign !  
 So much the better ! You're my captive now !  
 I'm glad you trust a fellow : friends grow thick  
 This way — that's twice said ; we were thickish,  
 though,  
 Even last night, and, ere night comes again,  
 I prophesy good luck to both of us !  
 For see now ! — back to ' *balmy eminence* '  
 Or ' *calm acclivity* ,' or what's the word ! 380

Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease  
 A sonnet for the Album, while I put  
 Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,  
 March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth —  
 (Even white-lying goes against my taste  
 After your little story). Oh, the niece  
 Is rationality itself! The aunt —  
 If she 's amenable to reason too —  
 Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect, 389  
 And let the Duke wait (I'll work well the Duke).  
 If she grows gracious, I return for you ;  
 If thunder 's in the air, why — bear your doom,  
 Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust  
 Of aunty from your shoes as off you go  
 By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought  
 How you shall pay me — that 's as sure as fate,  
 Old fellow! Off with you, face left about !  
 Yonder 's the path I have to pad. You see,  
 I'm in good spirits, God knows why ! Perhaps  
 Because the woman did not marry you 400  
 — Who look so hard at me, — and have the right,  
 One must be fair and own."

The two stand still

Under an oak.

“ Look here ! ” resumes the youth.  
 “ I never quite knew how I came to like  
 You — so much — whom I ought not court at all :  
 Nor how you had a leaning just to me  
 Who am assuredly not worth your pains.  
 For there must needs be plenty such as you  
 Somewhere about, — although I can't say where, —  
 Able and willing to teach all you know ; 410

While — how can you have missed a score like me  
 With money and no wit, precisely each  
 A pupil for your purpose, were it — ease  
 Fool's poke of tutor's *bonorarium*-fee?  
 And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt  
 At once my master: you as prompt descried  
 Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.  
 Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run  
 Sometimes so close together they converge — 419  
 Life's great adventures — you know what I mean —  
 In people. Do you know, as you advanced,  
 It got to be uncommonly like fact  
 We two had fallen in with — liked and loved  
 Just the same woman in our different ways?  
 I began life — poor groundling as I prove —  
 Winged and ambitious to fly high: why not?  
 There's something in 'Don Quixote' to the point,  
 My shrewd old father used to quote and praise —  
 'Am I born man?' asks Sancho: 'being man,  
 By possibility I may be Pope!' 430  
 So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step  
 And step, whereof the first should be to find  
 A perfect woman; and I tell you this —  
 If what I fixed on, in the order due  
 Of undertakings, as next step, had first  
 Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,  
 And I had been, the day I came of age,  
 Returned at head of poll for Westminster  
 — Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen 439  
 At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit,  
 To form and head a Tory ministry —  
 It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been  
 More strange to me, as now I estimate,  
 Than what did happen — sober truth, no dream.

I saw my wonder of a woman, — laugh,  
 I'm past that ! — in Commemoration-week.  
 A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul, —  
 With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink ;  
 But one to match that marvel — no least trace,  
 Least touch of kinship and community !      450  
 The end was — I did somehow state the fact,  
 Did, with no matter what imperfect words,  
 One way or other give to understand  
 That woman, soul and body were her slave  
 Would she but take, but try them — any test  
 Of will, and some poor test of power beside :  
 So did the strings within my brain grow tense  
 And capable of . . . hang similitudes !  
 She answered kindly but beyond appeal.  
 ' *No sort of hope for me, who came too late.*      460  
*She was another's. Love went — mine to her,*  
*Hers just as loyally to some one else.'*  
 Of course ! I might expect it ! Nature's law —  
 Given the peerless woman, certainly  
 Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match !  
 I acquiesced at once, submitted me  
 In something of a stupor, went my way.  
 I fancy there had been some talk before  
 Of somebody — her father or the like —  
 To coach me in the holidays, — that's how      470  
 I came to get the sight and speech of her, —  
 But I had sense enough to break off sharp,  
 Save both of us the pain."

“ Quite right there ! ”

Quite wrong, it happens !      Now comes worst of all !  
 R. C. — II



Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone  
The lovers — *I disturb the angel-mates ?*”

“Seraph paired off with cherub !”

“ Thank you ! While

I never plucked up courage to inquire  
Who he was, even, — certain-sure of this,  
That nobody I knew of had blue wings 480  
And wore a star-crown as he needs must do, —  
Some little lady, — plainish, pock-marked girl, —  
Finds out my secret in my woful face,  
Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,  
And pityingly pours her wine and oil  
This way into the wound : ‘ *Dear f-f-friend,*  
*Why waste affection thus on — must I say,*  
*A somewhat worthless object ? Who’s her choice —*  
*Irrevocable as deliberate —*  
*Out of the wide world ? I shall name no names — 490*  
*But there’s a person in society,*  
*Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown gray*  
*In idleness and sin of every sort*  
*Except hypocrisy : he’s thrice her age,*  
*A by-word for “ successes with the sex ”*  
*As the French say — and, as we ought to say,*  
*Consummately a liar and a rogue,*  
*Since — show me where’s the woman won without*  
*The help of this one lie which she believes —*  
*That — never mind how things have come to pass, 500*  
*And let who loves have loved a thousand times —*  
*All the same he now loves her only, loves*  
*Her ever ! if by “ won ” you just mean “ sold,”*  
*That’s quite another compact. Well, this scamp,*  
*Continuing descent from bad to worse,*

*Must leave his fine and fashionable prey  
 (Who — fathered, brothered, busbanded, — are bedged  
 About with thorny danger) and apply  
 His arts to this poor country ignorance  
 Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man 510  
 Her model hero! Why continue waste  
 On such a woman treasures of a heart  
 Would yet find solace, — yes, my f-f-friend —  
 In some congenial — fiddle-diddle-dee ?' ”*

“ Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described  
 Exact the portrait which my ‘f-f-friends’  
 Recognize as so like ? ’T is evident  
 You half surmised the sweet original  
 Could be no other than myself, just now ! 519  
 Your stop and start were flattering ! ”

“ Of course

Caricature’s allowed for in a sketch !  
 The longish nose becomes a foot in length,  
 The swarthy cheek gets copper-colored, — still,  
 Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts :  
 And ‘parson’s daughter’ — ‘young man coachable’ —  
 ‘Elderly party’ — ‘four years since’ — were facts  
 To fasten on, a moment ! Marriage, though —  
 That made the difference, I hope.”

“ All right !

I never married ; wish I had — and then  
 Unwish it : people kill their wives, sometimes ! 530  
 I hate my mistress, but I’m murder-free.  
 In your case, where’s the grievance ? You came last,  
 The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose  
 You, in the glory of your twenty-one,

Had happened to precede myself! 't is odds  
 But this gigantic juvenility,  
 This offering of a big arm's bony hand —  
 I'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know —  
 Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire  
 An altogether new Ideal — deem 540  
 Idolatry less due to life's decline  
 Productive of experience, powers mature  
 By dint of usage, the made man — no boy  
 That's all to make! I was the earlier bird —  
 And what I found, I let fall: what you missed  
 Who is the fool that blames you for?"

" Myself —

For nothing, everything! For finding out  
 She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper  
 In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?  
 She married him — the fifty-years-old rake — 550  
 How you have teased the talk from me! At last  
 My secret's told you. I inquired no more,  
 Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;  
 Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,  
 Married and happy, or else miserable —  
 It's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,  
 And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole  
 Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence  
 Badger-like, — '*Back to London*' was the word —  
 '*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,* 560  
*I'll undertake are easy!*' — the advice.  
 I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you —  
 (Little hand holding large hand pretty tight  
 For all its delicacy — eh, my lord?),  
 Until when, t' other day, I got a turn  
 Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!*' bade you,

*‘Marry your cousin, double your estate,  
 And take your ease by all means!’* So, I loll  
 On this the springy sofa, mine next month —  
 Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough 570  
 The very down you spread me out so smooth.  
 I wish this confidence were still to make!  
 Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the  
 sum  
 For stirring up the black depths! There’s repose  
 Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems  
 All that one has to bear; but folly — yes,  
 Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,  
 So humble, — such a coward rather say!  
 Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!  
 Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint) 580  
 My big and bony, here, against the bunch  
 Of lily-colored five with signet-ring,  
 Most like, for little-finger’s sole defence —  
 Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind  
 My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think —  
 To know I might have made that woman mine  
 But for the folly of the coward — know —  
 Or what’s the good of my apprenticeship  
 This twelvemonth to a master in the art? 589  
 Mine — had she been mine — just one moment mine  
 For honor, for dishonor — anyhow,  
 So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,  
 You’ve poked and proved stagnation is not sleep —  
 Hang you!”

“Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!  
 All this means — I who since I knew you first  
 Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock  
 O’ the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose —

Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped  
 By chick that wanted prompting 'Use the spur !'  
 While I was elsewhere putting mine to use. 600  
 As well might I blame you who kept aloof,  
 Seeing you could not guess I was alive,  
 Never advised me 'Do as I have done —  
*Reverence such a jewel as your luck  
 Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness !*  
 As your behavior was should mine have been,  
 — Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for :  
 Opposite ages, each with its mistake !  
 'If youth but would — if age but could,' you know.  
 Don't let us quarrel. Come, we're — young and old —  
 Neither so badly off. Go you your way, 611  
 Cut to the Cousin ! I'll to Inn, await  
 The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,  
 And wait my hour on 'calm acclivity'  
 In rumination manifold — perhaps  
 About ten thousand pounds I have to pay !"

## III.

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar  
 Conducive to resource, and saunteringly  
 Betakes him to the left-hand backward path, —  
 While, much sedate, the younger strides away  
 To right and makes for — islanded in lawn  
 And edged with shrubbery — the brilliant bit  
 Of Barry's building that's the Place, — a pair  
 Of women, at this nick of time, one young,  
 One very young, are ushered with due pomp  
 Into the same Inn-parlor — "*disengaged* 10  
*Entirely now !*" the obsequious landlord smiles,  
 "*Since the late occupants — whereof but one  
 Was quite a stranger*" — (smile enforced by bow)

“ *Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,  
Probably for the stranger’s sake !*” (Bow, smile,  
And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,  
Begin their talk : the girl, with sparkling eyes —  
“ Oh, I forewent him purposely ! but you,  
Who joined at — journeyed from the Junction here — 20  
I wonder how he failed your notice. Few  
Stop at our station : fellow-passengers  
Assuredly you were — I saw indeed  
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.  
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe  
Inside here first of all, so dodged about  
The dark end of the platform ; that’s his way —  
To swing from station straight to avenue  
And stride the half a mile for exercise.  
I fancied you might notice the huge boy. 30  
He soon gets o’er the distance ; at the house  
He’ll hear I went to meet him and have missed ;  
He’ll wait. No minute of the hour’s too much  
Meantime for our preliminary talk :  
First word of which must be — O good beyond  
Expression of all goodness — you to come !”

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

“ There was no helping that. You called for me,  
Cried, rather : and my old heart answered you.  
Still, thank me ! since the effort breaks a vow — 40  
At least, a promise to myself.”

“ I know !

How selfish get you happy folk to be !  
If I should love my husband, must I needs

Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,  
 As you do? Must I never dare leave house  
 On this dread Arctic expedition, out  
 And in again, six mortal hours, though you,  
 You even, my own friend for evermore,  
 Adjure me — fast your friend till rude love pushed  
 Poor friendship from her vantage — just to grant 50  
 The quarter of a whole day's company  
 And counsel? This makes counsel so much more  
 Need and necessity. For here 's my block  
 Of stumbling: in the face of happiness  
 So absolute, fear chills me. If such change  
 In heart be but love's easy consequence,  
 Do I love? If to marry mean — let go  
 All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze  
 On the great elm-tree in the open, posed 60  
 Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,  
 And leafage, one green plenitude of May.  
 The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful  
 Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,  
 Sun-warmth, dew-coolness, — squirrel, bee and bird,  
 High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims  
 'Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step  
 Heavenward!' — so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl — 70

"That's saved then: marriage spares the early taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

"If I had seen no other tree but this

*My life long*, while yourself came straight, you said,

From tree which overstretched you and was just  
 One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held  
 Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,  
 And magic fruits whereon the angels feed —  
 I looking out of window on a tree  
 Like yonder — otherwise well-known, much-liked, 80  
 Yet just an English ordinary elm —  
 What marvel if you cured me of conceit  
 My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry  
 Was quite the proud possession I supposed?  
 And there is evidence you tell me true.  
 The fairy marriage-tree reports itself  
 Good guardian of the perfect face and form,  
 Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend.  
 You are more beautiful than ever!"

“ Yes :

I think that likely. I could well dispense 90  
 With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,  
 Leave but enough of face to know me by —  
 With all found fresh in youth except such strength  
 As lets a life-long labor earn repose  
 Death sells at just that price, they say ; and so,  
 Possibly, what I care not for, I keep.”

“ How you must know he loves you ! Chill, before,  
 Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice —  
 Assured my lover simply loves my soul --  
 One nose-breadth of fair feature ? No, indeed ! 100  
 Your own love . . .”

“ The preliminary hour —  
 Don't waste it ! ”

“ But I can't begin at once !  
 The angel's self that comes to hear me speak



Drives away all the care about the speech.  
 What an angelic mystery you are —  
 Now — that is certain! when I knew you first,  
 No break of halo and no bud of wing!  
 I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,  
 Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,  
 You vanished, how and whither? Mystery! 110  
 Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,  
 Were loved again, and left the world of course:  
 Who would not? Lapped four years in fairyland,  
 Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,  
 The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss  
 Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice  
 That's now struck dumb at her own potency.  
*I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours*  
 Rather! The fool I ever was — I am,  
 You see that: the true friend you ever had, 120  
 You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,  
 Giving you all the love of all my heart,  
 Nature, that's niggard in me, has denied  
 The after-birth of love there's some one claims  
 — This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;  
 And I want counsel: is defect in me,  
 Or him who has no right to raise the love?  
 My cousin asks my hand: he's young enough,  
 Handsome, — my maid thinks, — manly's more the  
 word:  
 He asked my leave to 'drop' the elm-tree there, 130  
 Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness  
 Goes with the strength, of course. He's honest  
 too,  
 Limpidly truthful. For ability —  
 All's in the rough yet. His first taste of life  
*Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:*

He travelled, tried things—came back, tried still  
more —

He says he 's sick of all. He 's fond of me  
After a certain careless-earnest way  
I like : the iron 's crude, — no polished steel  
Somebody forged before me. I am rich — 140  
That 's not the reason, he 's far richer : no,  
Nor is it that he thinks me pretty, — frank  
Undoubtedly on that point ! He saw once  
The pink of face-perfection — oh, not you —  
Content yourself, my beauty ! — for she proved  
So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,  
He runs into extremes, I 'll say at once,  
Lest you say ! Well, I understand he wants  
Some one to serve, something to do : and both  
Requisites so abound in me and mine 150  
That here 's the obstacle which stops consent :  
The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust  
The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.  
Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me.  
Who, judging for herself succeeded so !*'  
Do I love him, does he love me, do both  
Mistake for knowledge — easy ignorance ?  
Appeal to its proficient in each art !  
I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,  
Rattled away last week till tutor came, 160  
Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott !  
Sagen Sie "easy" ? Every note is wrong.  
All thumped mit wrist : we 'll trouble fingers now.  
The Fräulein will please roll up Raff again  
And exercise at Czerny for one month !*'  
Am I to roll up cousin, exercise  
At Trollope's novels for one month ? Pro-  
nounce ! "

"Now, place each in the right position first,  
 Adviser and advised one! I perhaps  
 Am three — nay, four years older; am, beside, 170  
 A wife: advantages — to balance which,  
 You have a full fresh joyous sense of life  
 That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,  
 Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,  
 Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,  
 Your merest glimpses at the world without  
 Have shown you more than ever met my gaze;  
 And now, by joyance you inspire joy, — learn  
 While you profess to teach, and teach, although  
 Avowedly a learner. I am dazed 180  
 Like any owl by sunshine which just sets  
 The sparrow preening plumage! Here's to spy  
 — Your cousin! You have scanned him all your life,  
 Little or much; I never saw his face.  
 You have determined on a marriage — used  
 Deliberation therefore — I'll believe  
 No otherwise, with opportunity  
 For judgment so abounding! Here stand I —  
 Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim, 189  
 (Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)  
 Judge what is strangeness' self to me, — say '*Wed!*'  
 Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge  
 Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just  
 While he carves chicken! Sends he leg for wing?  
 That revelation into character  
 And conduct must suffice me! Quite as well  
 Consult with yonder solitary crow  
 That eyes us from your elm-top!"

"Still the same!

Do you remember, at the library

We saw together somewhere, those two books 200  
 Somebody said were noteworthy? One  
 Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves  
 For all the world's inspection; shut on shelf  
 Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked —  
 Clear to be let alone. Which page had we  
 Preferred the turning over of? You were,  
 Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold  
 Inside you secrets written, — soul-absorbed,  
 My ink upon your blotting-paper. I —  
 What trace of you have I to show in turn? 210  
 Delicate secrets! No one juvenile  
 Ever essayed at croquet and performed  
 Superiorly but I confided you  
 'The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.  
 While you? One day a calm note comes by post:  
 'I am just married, you may like to bear.'  
 Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love  
 What we fear, — I do! 'Cold' I shall expect  
 My cousin calls you. I — dislike not him,  
 But (if I comprehend what loving means) 220  
 Love you immeasurably more — more — more  
 Than even he who, loving you his wife,  
 Would turn up nose at who imperious,  
 Frivolous, forward — loves that excellence  
 Of all the earth he bows in worship to:  
 And who's this paragon of privilege?  
 Simply a country parson: his the power  
 That worked the miracle? Oh, no sound  
 But that you stand before me as you stand!  
 Such beauty does prove something, everything! 230  
 Beauty's the prize-flower which dispenses eye  
 From peering into what has nourished root —  
 Dew or manure: the plant that grows the best

Enough, from teaching youth and tending age  
 And hearing sermons, — haply writing tracts, —  
 From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,  
 Out blows this triumph! Therefore love's the soil  
 Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,  
 Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,  
 Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize 240  
 This cousin! Surely he's as worth your pains  
 To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,  
 You still keep staring at. I read your thoughts."

"At last?"

"At first! 'Would, tree, a-top of thee  
*I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,  
 And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,  
 Back to my nest where broods whom I love best —  
 The parson o'er his parish — garish — rarish —*  
 Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:  
 The Album here inspires me! Quite apart 250  
 From lyrical expression, have I read  
 The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"  
 "Or rather so? 'Cool comfortable elm  
*That men make coffins out of, — none for me  
 At thy expense, so thou permit I glide  
 Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,  
 Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"*

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.  
 The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,  
 You are a guesser, not a 'clairvoyante.' 260  
 I'll so far open you the locked and shelved

Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,  
As let you profit by the title-page ——”

“ *Paradise Lost ?* ”

“ *Inferno !* — All which comes  
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here !  
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,  
Come at your call, be sure that I will do  
All your requirement — see and say my mind.  
It may be that by sad apprenticeship  
I have a keener sense : I ’ll task the same. 270  
Only indulge me — here let sight and speech  
Happen — this Inn is neutral ground, you know !  
I cannot visit the old house and home,  
Encounter the old sociality  
Abjured forever. Peril quite enough  
In even this first — last, I pray it prove —  
Renunciation of my solitude !  
Back, you, to house and cousin ! Leave me here,  
Who want no entertainment, carry still  
My occupation with me. While I watch 280  
The shadow inching round those ferny feet,  
Tell him ‘ *A school-friend wants a word with me  
Up at the inn : time, tide and train won’t wait :  
I must go see her — on and off again —  
You ’ll keep me company ?* ’ Ten minutes’ talk,  
With you in presence, ten more afterward  
With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,  
And I see clearly — and say honestly  
To-morrow : pen shall play tongue’s part, you know.  
Go — quick ! for I have made our hand-in-hand 290  
Return impossible. So scared you look, —  
If cousin does not greet you with ‘ *What ghost  
Has crossed your path ?* ’ I set him down obtuse.”

And after one more look, with face still white,  
The younger does go, while the elder stands  
Occupied by the elm at window there.

## IV.

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade  
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern  
Five inches further to the South, the door  
Opens abruptly, some one enters sharp,  
The elder man returned to wait the youth:  
Never observes the room's new occupant,  
Throws hat on table, stoops quick; elbow-propped  
Over the Album wide there, bends down brow  
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,  
Then, — with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose 10  
Air of defiance to fate visibly  
Casting the toils about him, — mouths once more  
“*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*”  
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off  
T'other side table, looks up, starts erect  
Full-face with her who, — roused from that abstruse  
Question, “*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*”, —  
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,  
Away withers at once the weariness  
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate 20  
Convulse. Speech follows slower, but at last —

“You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!  
Knew, by some subtle undividable  
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,  
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave  
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,  
*My torment due on four years' respite!* Time

To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound !  
 Have your success ! Be satisfied this sole  
 Seeing you has undone all heaven could do 30  
 These four years, puts me back to you and hell !  
 What will next trick be, next success ? No doubt  
 When I shall think to glide into the grave,  
 There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,  
 And catch and capture me for evermore !  
 But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all !  
 Contest him for me ! Strive, for he is strong !”

Already his surprise dies palely out  
 In laugh of acquiescing impotence.  
 He neither gasps nor hisses : calm and plain — 40

“ I also felt and knew — but otherwise !  
*You* out of hand and sight and care of me  
 These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .  
 Oh, it's no superstition ! It's a gift  
 O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers  
 Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked,  
 Lay perdue paralyzing me, — drugged, drowsed  
 And damnified my soul and body both !  
 Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,  
 You and your malice ! I was, four years since, 50  
 — Well, a poor creature ! I become a knave.  
 I squandered my own pence : I plump my purse  
 With other people's pounds. I practised play  
 Because I liked it : play turns labor now  
 Because there's profit also in the sport.  
 I gamed with men of equal age and craft :  
 I steal here with a boy as green as grass  
 Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure  
 This long while, just to bring about to-day



When the boy beats me hollow, buries me 60  
 In ruin who was sure to beggar him.  
 O time indeed I should look up and laugh  
 ‘*Surely she closes on me!*’ Here you stand !”

And stand she does : while volubility,  
 With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue  
 After long locking-up is loosed for once.

“Certain the taunt is happy !” he resumes :  
 “So, I it was allured you — only I  
 — I, and none other — to this spectacle —  
 Your triumph, my despair — you woman-fiend 70  
 That front me ! Well, I have my wish, then ! See  
 The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair  
 Darker and darker as they coil and swathe  
 The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn  
 black

Not asleep now ! not pin-points dwarfed beneath  
 Either great bridging eyebrow — poor blank beads —  
 Babies, I ’ve pleased to pity in my time :  
 How they protrude and glow immense with hate !  
 The long triumphant nose attains — retains  
 Just the perfection ; and there ’s scarlet-skein 80  
 My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,  
 Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and bold  
 Because of chin, that based resolve beneath !  
 Then the columnar neck completes the whole  
 Greek-sculpture-baffling body ! Do I see ?  
 Can I observe ? You wait next word to come ?  
 Well, wait and want ! since no one blight I bid  
 Consume one least perfection. Each and all,  
 As they are rightly shocking now to me,  
*So may they still continue !* Value them ? 90

Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth  
 Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,  
 And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!  
 You have absolved me from my sin at least!  
 You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,  
 No touch of the tame timid nullity  
 My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!  
 Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act  
 Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,  
 I never doubted all was joke. I kept, 100  
 May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,  
 Newspaper-notice, — let no inquest slip,  
 Accident, disappearance: sound and safe  
 Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!  
 So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth  
 Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep  
 Was '*Into what dim hole can she have dived,  
 She and her wrongs, her woe that's wearing flesh  
 And blood away?*' Whereas, see, sorrow swells!  
 Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me, 110  
 Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,  
 O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept from  
 you

To me that craze, else unaccountable,  
 Which urged me to contest our county-seat  
 With whom but my own brother's nominee?  
 Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine  
 While I misused my moment, pushed, — one word, —  
 One hair's breadth more of gesture, — idiot-like  
 Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,  
 And lost the heiress in a grin? At least, 120  
 You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,  
 Landed your prize the true artistic way!  
 How did the smug young curate rise to tune

Of 'Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love  
 Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,  
 Betrayal: past is past; the future — yours —  
 Shall never be contaminate by mine.  
 I might have spared me this confession, not  
 — Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,  
 Easy, impenetrable! No! but say, 130  
 By just the quiet answer — "I am cold."  
 Falsehood avault, each shadow of thee, hence!  
 Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain.  
 Now, leave me — yes, for pity's sake!' Aha,  
 Who fails to see the curate as his face  
 Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief  
 At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until  
 Out burst the proper 'Angel, whom the fiend  
 Has thought to smirch, — thy whiteness, at one wipe  
 Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan! 140  
 Mine be the task' . . . and so forth! Fool? not he!  
 Cunning in flavors, rather! What but sour  
 Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,  
 And what stings love from faint to flamboyant  
 But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps —  
 'Love's flame in me by such recited wrong  
 Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the fiercelier  
 thence!'

Why, I have known men never love their wives  
 Till somebody — myself, suppose — had 'drenched  
 And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined: as if 150  
 The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb  
 Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled  
 No palsied person: half my age, or less,  
 The curate was, I'll wager: o'er young blood  
 Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but — was it *be*?  
 Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!

How frank you were about the audacious boy  
 Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt —  
 Passion and protestation! He it was  
 Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and ‘rich’ beside — 160  
 ‘Rich’ — how supremely did disdain curl nose!  
 All that I heard was — ‘wedded to a priest;’  
 Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.  
 And so my lawless love departed loves,  
 That loves might come together with a rush!  
 Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:  
 Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-queen,  
 Be merciful and let your subject slink  
 Into dark safety! He’s a beggar, see —  
 Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound, 170  
 And bid her land him right amid some crowd  
 Of creditors, assembled by your curse!  
 Don’t cause the very rope to crack (you can!)  
 Whereon he spends his last (friend’s) sixpence, just  
 The moment when he hoped to hang himself!  
 Be satisfied you beat him!”

She replies —

“Beat him! I do. To all that you confess  
 Of abject failure, I extend belief.  
 Your very face confirms it: God is just!  
 Let my face — fix your eyes! — in turn confirm 180  
 What I shall say. All-abject’s but half truth;  
 Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!  
 So is it you probed human nature, so  
 Prognosticated of me? Lay these words  
 To heart then, or where God meant heart should lurk!  
 That moment when you first revealed yourself,  
 My simple impulse prompted — end forthwith

The ruin of a life uprooted thus  
 To surely perish! How should such spoiled tree  
 Henceforward balk the wind of its worst sport, 190  
 Fail to go falling deeper, falling down  
 From sin to sin until some depth were reached  
 Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest  
 Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,  
 That self-display made absolute, — behold  
 A new revelation! — round you pleased to veer,  
 Propose me what should prompt annul the past,  
 Make me '*amends by marriage*' — in your phrase,  
 Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,  
 With soul and body which mere brushing past 200  
 Brought leprosy upon me — '*marry*' these!  
 Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,  
 Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt  
 As I — thank God! — at the contemptible,  
 Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away  
 By treason from my rightful pride of place,  
 I was not destined to the shame below.  
 A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,  
 But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last  
 Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage — no! 210  
 '*Bare breast be on hard rock,*' laughed out my soul  
 In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*  
*The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice*  
*This wreck of me!*' The wind, — I broke in  
 bloom  
 At passage of, — which stripped me bole and branch,  
 Twisted me up and tossed me here, — turns back,  
 And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?  
 Be satisfied, not one least leaf that's mine  
 Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!  
 Rather I give such remnant to the rock 220

Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.  
 Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,  
 Even : enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,  
 Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,  
 I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade  
 His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind, —  
 Now that I know if God or Satan be  
 Prince of the Power of the Air, — then, then, indeed,  
 Let my life end and degradation too !”

“ Good !” he smiles, “ true Lord Byron ! ‘ *Tree  
 and rock :*’ 230  
 ‘ *Rock*’ — there’s advancement ! He’s at first a  
 youth,  
 Rich, worthless therefore ; next he grows a priest :  
 Youth, riches prove a notable resource,  
 When to leave me for their possessor gluts  
 Malice abundantly ; and now, last change,  
 The young rich parson represents a rock  
 — Bloodstone, no doubt. He’s Evangelical ?  
 Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse !”

She speaks.

“ I have a story to relate.  
 There was a parish-priest, my father knew, 240  
 Elderly, poor : I used to pity him  
 Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.  
 Elderly was grown old now, scanty means  
 Were straitening fast to poverty, beside  
 The ailments which await in such a case.  
 Limited every way, a perfect man  
 Within the bounds built up and up since birth  
 Breast-high about him till the outside world

Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky —  
 Faith : he had faith in dogma, small or great,      250  
 As in the fact that if he clave his skull  
 He 'd find a brain there : who proves such a fact  
 No falsehood by experiment at price  
 Of soul and body ? The one rule of life  
 Delivered him in childhood was ' *Obey !*  
*Labor !*' He had obeyed and labored — tame,  
 True to the mill-track blinked on from above.  
 Some scholarship he may have gained in youth :  
 Gone — dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,  
 Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head,      260  
 I used to think ; but January joins  
 December, as his year had known no May  
 Trouble its snow-deposit, — cold and old !  
 I heard it was his will to take a wife,  
 A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach —  
 How ? with experience null, nor sympathy  
 Abundant, — while himself worked dogma dead,  
 Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,  
 Womankind, childhood ? These demand a wife. 269  
 Supply the want, then ! theirs the wife ; for him —  
 No coarsest sample of the proper sex  
 But would have served his purpose equally  
 With God's own angel, — let but knowledge match  
 Her coarseness : zeal does only half the work.  
 I saw this — knew the purblind honest drudge  
 Was wearing out his simple blameless life,  
 And wanted help beneath a burthen — borne  
 To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I ?  
 Partner he needed : I proposed myself,  
 Nor much surprised him — duty was so clear !      280  
 Gratitude ? What for ? Gain of Paradise —  
 Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty

Of who hides talent in a napkin? No:  
 His scruple was — should I be strong enough  
 — In body? since of weakness in the mind,  
 Weariness in the heart — no fear of these!  
 He took me as these Arctic voyagers  
 Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:  
 Can he endure them? — that's the point, and not 289  
 — Will he? Who would not, rather! Whereupon,  
 I pleaded far more earnestly for leave  
 To give myself away, than you to gain  
 What you called priceless till you gained the heart  
 And soul and body! which, as beggars serve  
 Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.  
 Not so my husband, — for I gained my suit,  
 And had my value put at once to proof.  
 Ask him! These four years I have died away  
 In village-life. The village? Ugliness  
 At best and filthiness at worst, inside. 300  
 Outside, sterility — earth sown with salt  
 Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.  
 The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,  
 That commonplace to such stupidity  
 Is all-recondite. Being brutalized  
 Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts  
 And kindly cluckings, no articulate  
 Nonsense that's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the  
 sick,  
 Sickened myself at pig-perversity, 309  
 Cat-craft, dog-snarling, — may be, snapping . . .”

“ Brief :

You eat that root of bitterness called Man  
 — Raw : I prefer it cooked, with social sauce !  
 So, he was not the rich youth after all !



Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be  
The compensation. If not young nor rich . . .”

“ You interrupt.”

“ Because you 've daubed enough  
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,  
Produce your figure well-relieved in front !  
The contrast — do not I anticipate ?  
Though neither rich nor young — what then ? 'T is  
all 320  
Forgotten, all this ignobility,  
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,  
The something sweeter . . .”

“ Yes, you interrupt.  
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives  
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,  
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Selfishness  
In us met selfishness in them, deserved  
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent  
On saving his own soul by saving theirs, —  
They, bent on being saved if saving soul 330  
Included body's getting bread and cheese  
Somehow in life and somehow after death, —  
Both parties were alike in the same boat,  
One danger, therefore one equality.  
Safety induces culture : culture seeks  
To institute, extend and multiply  
The difference between safe man and man,  
Able to live alone now ; progress means  
What but abandonment of fellowship ?  
We were in common danger, still stuck close. 340  
No new books, — were the old ones mastered yet ?  
No pictures and no music : these divert

— What from ? the staving danger off ! You paint  
 The waterspout above, you set to words  
 The roaring of the tempest round you ? Thanks !  
 Amusement ? Talk at end of the tired day  
 Of the more tiresome morrow ! I transcribed  
 The page on page of sermon-scrawlings — stopped  
 Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound —  
 Vainly : the sound and sense would penetrate 350  
 To brain and plague there in despite of me  
 Maddened to know more moral good were done  
 Had we two simply sallied forth and preached  
 I ' the ' *Green* ' they call their grimy, — I with twang  
 Of long-disused guitar, — with cut and slash  
 Of much-misvalued horsewhip he, — to bid  
 The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker  
 Pay in his person ! Whereas — Heaven and Hell,  
 Excite with that, restrain with this ! So dealt  
 His drugs my husband ; as he dosed himself, 360  
 He drenched his cattle : and, for all my part  
 Was just to dub the mortar, never fear  
 But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose !  
 Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed :  
 As applicable therefore to the sleep  
 I want, that knows no waking — as to what 's  
 Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt  
 Souls less world-weary : there, no fault to find !  
 But Hell he made explicit. After death,  
 Life : man created new, ingeniously 370  
 Perfect for a vindictive purpose now  
 That man, first fashioned in beneficence,  
 Was proved a failure ; intellect at length  
 Replacing old obtuseness, memory  
 Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds  
 Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay

Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart ;  
 New gift of observation up and down  
 And round man's self, new power to apprehend  
 Each necessary consequence of act 380  
 In man for well or ill — things obsolete —  
 Just granted to supplant the idiocy  
 Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,  
 With ill or well momentarily its fruit ;  
 A faculty of immense suffering  
 Conferred on mind and body, — mind, erewhile  
 Unvisited by one compunctious dream  
 During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,  
 Stung through and through by sin's significance  
 Now that the holy was abolished — just 390  
 As body which, alive, broke down beneath  
 Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,  
 Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,  
 Achieve aught worthy, — which grew old in youth,  
 And at its longest fell a cut-down flower, —  
 Dying, this too revived by miracle  
 To bear no end of burthen now that back  
 Supported torture to no use at all,  
 And live imperishably potent — since  
 Life's potency was impotent to ward 400  
 One plague off which made earth a hell before.  
 This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,  
 One sane sight of the general ordinance —  
 Nature, — and its particular object, — man, —  
 Which one mere eye-cast at the character  
 Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,  
 Had dissipated once and evermore, —  
 This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.  
 Why ? Because none believed it. *They* desire 409  
*Such Heaven* and dread such Hell, whom every day

The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids  
 Defy the other? All the harm is done  
 Ourselves — done my poor husband who in youth  
 Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still  
 Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead —  
 Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality —  
 Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,

But she continues.

“ — Life which, thanks once more  
 To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,  
 I acquiescingly — I gratefully 420  
 Take back again to heart! and hence this speech  
 Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long  
 Life — I began to find intolerable,  
 Only this moment. Ere your entry just,  
 The leap of heart which answered, spite of me,  
 A friend's first summons, first provocative,  
 Authoritative, nay, compulsive call  
 To quit, though for a single day, my house  
 Of bondage — made return seem horrible.  
 I heard again a human lucid laugh 430  
 All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue  
 Its narrow busy way amid small cares,  
 Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few  
 flowers, —  
 Never suspicious of a thunderbolt  
 Avenging presently each daisy's death.  
 I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush  
 Repeated his old music-phrase, — all right,  
 How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke  
 Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.

I honestly submit my soul : which sprang 440  
 At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed  
 ' *Failure.*' No love more ? then, no beauty more  
 Which tends to breed love ! Purify my powers,  
 Effortless till some other world procure  
 Some other chance of prize ! or, if none be, —  
 Nor second world nor chance, — undesecrate  
 Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised  
 Where May's precipitation left June blank !  
 Better have failed in the high aim, as I,  
 Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed 450  
 As, God be thanked, I do not ! Ugliness  
 Had I called beauty, falsehood — truth, and you  
 — My lover ! No — this earth's unchanged for me,  
 By his enchantment whom God made the Prince  
 O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven : there is  
 Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation — earth.  
 I sit possessed in patience ; prison-roof  
 Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with ; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit 460  
 I wish myself had proved as teachable !  
 — Or, no ! until you taught me, could I learn  
 A lesson from experience ne'er till now  
 Conceded ? Please you listen while I show  
 How thoroughly you estimate my worth  
 And yours — the immeasurably superior ! I  
 Believed at least in one thing, first to last, —  
 Your love to me : I was the vile and you  
 The precious ; I abused you, I betrayed,  
 But doubted — never ! Why else go my way 470  
*Judas-like* plodding to this Potter's Field

Where fate now finds me ? What has dinned my  
car

And dogged my step ? The spectre with the shriek  
‘ *Such she was, such were you, whose punishment  
Is just !* ’ And such she was not, all the while !  
She never owned a love to outrage, faith  
To pay with falsehood ! For, my heart knows this —  
Love once and you love always. Why, it ’s down  
Here in the Album : every lover knows  
Love may use hate but — turn to hate, itself — 480  
Turn even to indifference — no, indeed !  
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like  
The witless negro by the Obeah-man  
Who bids him wither : so, his eye grows dim,  
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear  
Goes wandering wide, — and all the woe because  
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,  
Was just a feather-phantom ! I wronged love,  
Am ruined, — and there was no love to wrong ! ”

“ No love ? Ah, dead love ! I invoke thy ghost 490  
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life  
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt  
On pasteboard and pretence ! Not love, my love ?  
I changed for you the very laws of life :  
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.  
No genius but you could have been, no sage,  
No sufferer — which is grandest — for the truth !  
My hero — where the heroic only hid  
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day !  
Age and decline were man’s maturity ; 500  
Face, form were nature’s type : more grace, more  
strength,  
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,

Lawless divergence ? I have danced through day  
 On tiptoe at the music of a word,  
 Have wondered where was darkness gone as night  
 Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile !  
 Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat  
 Your fancied presence ; in companionship,  
 I kept my finger constant to your glove  
 Glued to my breast ; then — where was all the  
 world ?

510

I schemed — not dreamed — how I might die some death  
 Should save your finger aching ! Who creates  
 Destroys, he only : I had laughed to scorn  
 Whatever angel tried to shake my faith  
 And make you seem unworthy : you yourself  
 Only could do that ! With a touch 't was done.  
 ' Give me all, trust me wholly ! ' At the word,  
 I did give, I did trust — and thereupon  
 The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,  
 The masterfully-folded arm in arm,

520

As trick obtained its triumph one time more !  
 In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat :  
 Treason like faith moves mountains : love is gone ! "

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close  
 And calls her by her name. Then —

“ God forgives .

Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near  
 As never priests could bring him to this soul  
 That prays you both — forgive me ! I abase —  
 Know myself mad and monstrous utterly  
 In all I did that moment ; but as God

530

Gives me this knowledge — heart to feel and tongue  
 To testify — so be you gracious too !  
*Judge no man by the solitary work*

Of — well, they do say and I can believe —  
 The devil in him : his, the moment, — mine  
 The life — your life ! ”

He names her name again.

“ You were just — merciful as just, you were  
 In giving me no respite : punishment  
 Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,  
 The patient thanks decision, promptitude, 540  
 Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt,  
 Haply to others, surely to himself.  
 I wake and would not you had spared one pang.  
 All ’s well that ends well ! ”

Yet again her name.

“ Had *you* no fault ? Why must you change, for-  
 sooth,  
 Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play ?  
 Why did your nobleness look up to me,  
 Not down on the ignoble thing confessed ?  
 Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low ? 549  
 Wherefore did God exalt you ? Who would teach  
 The brute man’s tameness and intelligence  
 Must never drop the dominating eye :  
 Wink — and what wonder if the mad fit break,  
 Followed by stripes and fasting ? Sound and sane,  
 My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.  
 Accept, redeem me ! Do your eyes ask ‘ *How ?* ’  
 I stand here penniless, a beggar ; talk  
 What idle trash I may, this final blow  
 Of fortune fells me. I disburse, indeed,  
 This boy his winnings ? when each bubble-scheme 560



That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,  
 The worse the better, — of repairing straight  
 My misadventure by fresh enterprise,  
 Capture of other boys in foolishness  
 His fellows, — when these fancies fade away  
 At first sight of the lost so long, the found  
 So late, the lady of my life, before  
 Whose presence I, the lost, am also found  
 Incapable of one least touch of mean  
 Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile — 570  
 That family of snakes your eye bids flee !  
 Listen ! Our troublesomest dreams die off  
 In daylight : I awake, and dream is — where ?  
 I rouse up from the past : one touch dispels  
 England and all here. I secured long since  
 A certain refuge, solitary home  
 To hide in, should the head strike work one day,  
 The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps  
 Society grow savage, — there to end  
 My life's remainder, which, say what fools will, 580  
 Is or should be the best of life, — its fruit,  
 All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.  
 Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,  
 Blend loves there ! Let this parenthetic doubt  
 Of love, in me, have been the trial-test  
 Appointed to all flesh at some one stage  
 Of soul's achievement, — when the strong man doubts  
 His strength, the good man whether goodness be,  
 The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find  
 Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine. 590  
 What if the lover may elude, no more  
 Than these, probative dark, must search the sky  
 Vainly for love, his soul's star ? But the orb  
*Breaks from eclipse* : I breathe again : I love !

Tempted, I fell ; but fallen — fallen lie  
 Here at your feet, see ! Leave this poor pretence  
 Of union with a nature and its needs  
 Repugnant to your needs and nature ! Nay,  
 False, beyond falsity you reprehend  
 In me, is such mock marriage with such mere 600  
 Man-mask as — whom you witless wrong, beside,  
 By that expenditure of heart and brain  
 He recks no more of than would yonder tree  
 If watered with your life-blood : rains and dews  
 Answer its ends sufficiently, while me  
 One drop saves — sends to flower and fruit at last  
 The laggard virtue in the soul which else  
 Cumbers the ground ! Quicken me ! Call me yours —  
 Yours and the world's — yours and the world's and  
 God's !

Yes, for you can, you only ! Think ! Confirm 610  
 Your instinct ! Say, a minute since, I seemed  
 The castaway you count me, — all the more  
 Apparent shall the angelic potency  
 Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps  
 To light and life and love ! — that's love for you —  
 Love that already dares match might with yours.  
 You loved one worthy, — in your estimate, —  
 When time was ; you descried the unworthy taint,  
 And where was love then ? No such test could e'er  
 Try my love : but you hate me and revile ; 620  
 Hatred, revilement — had you these to bear  
 Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,  
 But simply love on, love the more, perchance ?  
 Abide by your own proof ! *'Your love was love :  
 Its ghost knows no forgetting !'* Heart of mine,  
 Would that I dared remember ! Too unwise  
 Were he who lost a treasure, did himself

Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue  
 Of gems to her his queen who trusted late  
 The keeper of her caskets! Can it be 630  
 That I, custodian of such relic still  
 As your contempt permits me to retain,  
 All I dare hug to breast is — ‘*How your glove  
 Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!*’  
 What may have followed — that is forfeit now!  
 I hope the proud man has grown humble. True —  
 One grace of humbleness absents itself —  
 Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,  
 And not the spoken but the speechless love  
 Waits answer ere I rise and go my way.’” 640

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,  
 Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul  
 Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,  
 On, till — thinned, softened, silvered, one might say  
 The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,  
 Moistens the hard gray grimly comic speech.

“ Ay — give the baffled angler even yet  
 His supreme triumph as he hales to shore  
 A second time the fish once ’scaped from hook : 650  
 So artfully has new bait hidden old  
 Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb’s beneath  
 The gilded minnow here! You bid break trust,  
 This time, with who trusts me, — not simply bid  
 Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,  
 In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,  
 I know the feel of sin and shame, — be sure,  
*I shall obey you and impose them both*

On one who happens to be ignorant  
 Although my husband — for the lure is love, 660  
 Your love ! Try other tackle, fisher-friend !  
 Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,  
 What you had been, may yet be, would I but  
 Prove helpmate to my hero — one and all  
 These silks and worsteds round the hook seduce  
 Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.  
 Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt !  
 Who wonders at variety of wile  
 In the Arch-cheat ? You are the Adversary !  
 Your fate is of your choosing : have your choice ! 670  
 Wander the world, — God has some end to serve  
 Ere he suppress you ! He waits : I endure,  
 But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,  
 To stop your passage to the pit. Enough  
 That I am stable, uninvolved by you  
 In the rush downwards : free I gaze and fixed ;  
 Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move alike  
 My crowned contempt. You kneel ? Prostrate your-  
 self !

To earth, and would the whole world saw you there !”

Whereupon — “ All right ! ” carelessly begins 680  
 Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair,  
 And sends his voice for herald of approach :  
 Half in half out the doorway as the door  
 Gives way to push.

“ Old fellow, all ’s no good !  
 The train ’s your portion ! Lay the blame on me !  
 I ’m no diplomatist, and Bismarck’s self  
 Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach  
 Of proposition — so has world-repute  
 Preceded the illustrious stranger ! Ah ! — ”

Quick the voice changes to astonishment, 690  
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands  
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries — throat and brow —  
The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn :  
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become  
Intenser : quail at gaze, not they indeed !

## v.

It is the young man shatters silence first.

“ Well, my lord — for indeed my lord you are,  
I little guessed how rightly — this last proof  
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much  
My simple head-piece ! Let 's see how we stand  
Each to the other ! how we stood i' the game  
Of life an hour ago, — the magpies, stile  
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for truth —  
My lord confessed his four-years-old affair —  
How he seduced and then forsook the girl 10  
Who married somebody and left him sad.  
My pitiful experience was — I loved  
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch  
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed.  
She left me, sad enough, to marry — whom ?  
A better man, — then possibly not you !  
How does the game stand ? Who is who and what  
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by ?  
My lord's ‘ *seduced, forsaken, sacrificed,*’  
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument, 20  
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave —  
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly !

— Ay, and since ‘bag and baggage’ is a phrase —  
 Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,  
 Was but unpadlocked when occasion came  
 For holding council, since my back was turned,  
 On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,  
 Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,  
 Beside refunding these ! Why else allow  
 The fool to gain them ? So displays herself 30  
 The lady whom my heart believed — oh, laugh !  
 Noble and pure : whom my heart loved at once,  
 And who at once did speak truth when she said  
 ‘ *I am not mine now but another’s* ’ — thus  
 Being that other’s ! Devil’s-marriage, eh ?  
 ‘ *My lie weds thine till lucre us do part ?* ’  
 But pity me the snobbish simpleton,  
 You two aristocratic tip-top swells  
 At swindling ! Quits, I cry ! Decamp content 39  
 With skin I’m peeled of : do not strip bones bare —  
 As that you could, I have no doubt at all !  
 O you two rare ones ! Male and female, Sir !  
 The male there smirked, this morning, ‘ *Come, my boy—  
 Out with it ! You’ve been crossed in love, I think :  
 I recognize the lover’s hangdog look ;  
 Make a clean breast and match my confidence,  
 For, I’ll be frank, I too have had my fling,  
 Am punished for my fault, and smart enough !  
 Where now the victim hides her head, God knows !* ’  
 Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew ! 50  
 Look out, Salvini ! Here’s your man, your match !  
 He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,  
 Last Monday — ‘ *Here’s Othello* ’ was our word,  
 ‘ *But where’s Iago ?* ’ Where ? Why, there ! And  
 now  
 The fellow-artist, female specimen —

Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself !  
 He 's great in art, but you — how greater still  
 — (If I can rightly, out of all I learned,  
 Apply one bit of Latin that assures 59  
 ‘ *Art means just art’s concealment* ’) — tower yourself !  
 For he stands plainly visible henceforth —  
 Liar and scamp : while you, in artistry  
 Prove so consummate — or I prove perhaps  
 So absolute an ass — that — either way —  
 You still do seem to me who worshipped you  
 And see you take the homage of this man  
 Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,  
 Before a mistress in his very craft . . .  
 Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,  
 Nor trust my understanding ! Still you seem 70  
 Noble and pure as when we had the talk  
 Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.  
 And there’s the key explains the secret : down  
 He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade  
 I’ the mystery of humbug : well he may !  
 For how you beat him ! Half an hour ago,  
 I held your master for my best of friends ;  
 And now I hate him ! Four years since, you seemed  
 My heart’s one love : well, and you so remain ! 79  
 What’s he to you in craft ?”

She looks him through.

“ My friend, ’t is just that friendship have its turn —  
 Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes  
 The worst, has questioned and is answered by.  
 Take you as frank an answer ! answers both  
 Begin alike so far, divergent soon  
 World-wide — I own superiority

Over you, over him. As him I searched,  
 So do you stand seen through and through by me  
 Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines  
 A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round 90  
 A spider in the hollow heart his house !  
 Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared  
 When out you stepped on me, a minute since,  
 — This man's confederate ! no, you step not thus  
 Obsequiously at beck and call to help  
 At need some second scheme, and supplement  
 Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me  
 From struggle and escape ! I fancied that !  
 Forgive me ! Only by strange chance, — most strange  
 In even this strange world, — you enter now, 100  
 Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged  
 Who never wronged you — least of all, my friend,  
 That day beneath the College tower and trees,  
 When I refused to say, — '*not friend but, love !*'  
 Had I been found as free as air when first  
 We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No —  
 For where was that in you which claimed return  
 Of love ? My eyes were all too weak to probe  
 This other's seeming, but that seeming loved  
 The soul in me, and lied — I know too late ! 110  
 While your truth was truth : and I knew at once  
 My power was just my beauty — bear the word —  
 As I must bear, of all my qualities,  
 To name the poorest one that serves my soul  
 And simulates myself ! So much in me  
 You loved, I know : the something that 's beneath  
 Heard not your call, — uncalled, no answer comes !  
 For, since in every love, or soon or late  
 Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,  
 Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day, 120



Take flight to find some other; so it proved —  
 Missing me, you were ready for this man.  
 I apprehend the whole relation: his —  
 The soul wherein you saw your type of worth  
 At once, true object of your tribute. Well  
 Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love  
 Divining, had assured you I no more  
 Stand his participant in infamy  
 Than you — I need no love to recognize  
 As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat! 130  
 Therefore accept one last friend's-word, — your  
 friend's,

All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out  
 The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,  
 Distribute as it please you praise or blame  
 To me — so you but fling this mockery far —  
 Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,  
 This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!  
 Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart  
 The lesson I was sent, — if man discerned  
 Ever God's message, — just to teach. I judge — 140  
 To far another issue than could dream  
 Your cousin, — younger, fairer, as befits —  
 Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.  
 I find you, save in folly, innocent.  
 And in my verdict lies your fate; at choice  
 Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. 'Take!'  
 I bid her — for you tremble back to truth.  
 She turns the scale, — one touch of the pure hand  
 Shall so press down, emprison past relapse  
 Farther vibration 'twixt veracity — 150  
 That's honest solid earth — and falsehood, theft  
 And air, that's one illusive emptiness!  
*That reptile capture you? I conquered him:*

You saw him cower before me. Have no fear  
 He shall offend you farther! Spare to spurn —  
 Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve  
 Than I, anticipate the snake — bruise head  
 Ere he bruise heel — or, wavier than the first,  
 Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest  
 Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life ! 160

“ You ! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I  
 Leave each ! There 's caution surely extant yet  
 Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.  
 Hence quickly ! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled  
 The heart I rescue and would lay to heal  
 Beside another's ! Never let her know  
 How near came taint of your companionship ! ”

“ Ah ” — draws a long breath with a new strange look  
 The man she interpellates — soul a-stir  
 Under its covert, as, beneath the dust, 170  
 A coppery sparkle all at once denotes  
 The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

“ Ah —

Innocence should be crowned with ignorance ?  
 Desirable indeed, but difficult !  
 As if yourself, now, had not glorified  
 Your helpmate by imparting him a hint  
 Of how a monster made the victim bleed  
 Ere crook and courage saved her — hint, I say, —  
 Not the whole horror, — that were needless risk, —  
 But just such inkling, fancy of the fact, 180  
 As should suffice to qualify henceforth  
 The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,  
 For warning ‘ *Ware the wolf!* ’ No doubt at all,

Silence is generosity, — keeps wolf  
 Unhunted by flock's warder ! Excellent,  
 Did — generous to me, mean — just to him !  
 But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found  
 Outraging the deceitless ! So, — he knows !  
 And yet, unharmed I breathe — perchance, repent —  
 Thanks to the mercifully-politic !” 190

“ Ignorance is not innocence but sin —  
 Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs  
 Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful  
 Am I ? Perhaps ! The more contempt, the less  
 Hatred ; and who so worthy of contempt  
 As you that rest assured I cooled the spot  
 I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,  
 Whose hand I pressed there ? Understand for once  
 That, sick, of all the pains corroding me  
 This burnt the last and nowise least — the need 200  
 Of simulating soundness. I resolved —  
 No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh —  
 To hide the truth away as in a grave  
 From — most of all — my husband : he nor knows  
 Nor ever shall be made to know your part,  
 My part, the devil's part, — I trust, God's part  
 In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save  
 And not destroy : and what destruction like  
 The abolishing of faith in him, that's faith  
 In me as pure and true ? Acquaint some child 210  
 Who takes yon tree into his confidence,  
 That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,  
 And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,  
 Only to pillow him is product just  
 Of what lies festering beneath ! 'T is God  
*Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man ?*

The miserable thing I have become  
 By dread acquaintance with my secret — *you* —  
 That thing had he become by learning *me* —  
 The miserable, whom his ignorance 220  
 Would wrongly call the wicked : ignorance  
 Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.  
 No, he knows nothing ! ”

“ He and I alike  
 Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.  
 What if our talk should terminate awhile ?  
 Here is a gentleman to satisfy,  
 Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds  
 Before we part — as, by his face, I fear,  
 Results from your appearance on the scene.  
 Grant me a minute’s parley with my friend 230  
 Which scarce admits of a third personage !  
 The room from which you made your entry first  
 So opportunely — still untenanted —  
 What if you please return there ? Just a word  
 To my young friend first — then, a word to you,  
 And you depart to fan away each fly  
 From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home ! ”

“ So the old truth comes back ! A wholesome change, —  
 At last the altered eye, the rightful tone !  
 But even to the truth that drops disguise 240  
 And stands forth grinning malice which but now  
 Whined so contritely — I refuse assent  
 Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back ?  
 No, my lord ! I enjoy the privilege  
 Of being absolutely loosed from you  
 Too much — the knowledge that your power is null  
 Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,

A wink of eye would have detained me once,  
 Body and soul your slave ; and now, thank God,  
 Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest 250  
 Of curses — neither would avail to turn  
 My footstep for a moment ! ”

“ Prayer, then, tries

No such adventure. Let us cast about  
 For something novel in expedient : take  
 Command, — what say you ? I profess myself  
 One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,  
 I bid — not only wait there, but return  
 Here, where I want you ! Disobey and — good !  
 On your own head the peril ! ”

“ Come ! ” breaks in

The boy with his good glowing face. “ Shut up ! 260  
 None of this sort of thing while I stand here  
 — Not to stand that ! No bullying, I beg !  
 I also am to leave you presently  
 And never more set eyes upon your face —  
 You won't mind that much ; but — I tell you frank —  
 I do mind having to remember this  
 For your last word and deed — my friend who were !  
 Bully a woman you have ruined, eh ?  
 Do you know, — I give credit all at once  
 To all those stories everybody told 270  
 And nobody but I would disbelieve :  
 They all seem likely now, — nay, certain, sure !  
 I dare say you did cheat at cards that night  
 The row was at the Club : ‘ sauter la coupe ’ —  
 That was your ‘ cut,’ for which your friends ‘ cut ’ you ;  
 While I, the booby, ‘ cut ’ — acquaintanceship  
 With who so much as laughed when I said ‘ luck ! ’

I dare say you had bets against the horse  
 They doctored at the Derby ; little doubt,  
 That fellow with the sister found you shirk 280  
 His challenge and did kick you like a ball,  
 Just as the story went about ! Enough :  
 It only serves to show how well advised,  
 Madam, you were in bidding such a fool  
 As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight  
 And sound of you suffice to tumble down  
 Conviction topsy-turvy : no, — that 's false, —  
 There 's no unknowing what one knows ; and yet  
 Such is my folly that, in gratitude 289  
 For . . . well, I 'm stupid ; but you seemed to wish  
 I should know gently what I know, should slip  
 Softly from old to new, not break my neck  
 Between beliefs of what you were and are.  
 Well then, for just the sake of such a wish  
 To cut no worse a figure than needs must  
 In even eyes like mine, I 'd sacrifice  
 Body and soul ! But don't think danger — pray ! —  
 Menaces either ! He do harm to us ?  
 Let me say ' us ' this one time ! You 'd allow  
 I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear 300  
 Of some cur's yelping — hand that 's fortified,  
 Into the bargain, with a horsewhip ? Oh,  
 One crack and you shall see how curs decamp !  
 My lord, you know your losses and my gains.  
 Pay me my money at the proper time !  
 If cash be not forthcoming, — well, yourself  
 Have taught me, and tried often, I 'll engage,  
 The proper course : I post you at the Club,  
 Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day, 309  
 Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone !  
 There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think ! "

" Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less  
 Than grateful scholar ! Nay, he brings to mind  
 My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,  
 So long has it lain rusty ! Post my name !  
 That were indeed a wheal from whipcord ! Whew !  
 I wonder now if I could rummage out  
 — Just to match weapons — some old scorpion-scourge !  
 Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud  
 His triumph o'er the master. I — no more 320  
 Bully, since I 'm forbidden : but entreat —  
 Wait and return — for my sake, no ! but just  
 To save your own defender, should he chance  
 Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong.  
 And what if — since all waiting 's weary work —  
 I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now .  
 And entry then ? for — pastime proper — here 's  
 The very thing, the Album, verse and prose  
 To make the laughing minutes launch away !  
 Each of us must contribute. I 'll begin — 330  
 ' Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !'  
 I 'm confident I beat the bard, — for why ?  
 My young friend owns me an Iago — him  
 Confessed, among the other qualities,  
 A ready rhymer. Oh, he rhymed ! Here goes !  
 — Something to end with ' *borsewhip* ' ! No, that  
 rhyme  
 Beats me ; there 's ' *cowslip* , ' ' *boltsprit* , ' nothing else !  
 So, Tennyson take my benison, — verse for bard,  
 Prose suits the gambler's book best ! Dared and done ! "

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two, 340  
 Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,  
 Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,  
 Turns half away, turns round again, at last

Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.  
The door shuts fast the couple.

## VI.

With a change

Of his whole manner, opens out at once  
The Adversary.

“Now, my friend, for you !  
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,  
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware !  
Plain speech in me becomes respectable  
Henceforth, because courageous ; plainly, then —  
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light ! )  
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged  
Yourself and friend by passing in review 10  
So courteously but now, I vainly search  
To find one record of a specimen  
So perfect of the pure and simple fool  
As this you furnish me. Ingratitude  
I lump with folly, — all 's one lot, — so — fool !  
Did I seek you or you seek me ? Seek ? sneak  
For service to, and service you would style —  
And did style — godlike, scarce an hour ago !  
Fool, there again, yet not precisely there  
First-rate in folly : since the hand you kissed 20  
Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm  
Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade  
Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,  
Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut  
On that firm pavement which your cowardice  
Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next  
Came need to clear your brains of their conceit  
They cleverly could distinguish who was who,



Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare,  
 Men, now — familiarly you read them off, 30  
 Each phiz at first sight! O you had an eye!  
 Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox  
 Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff  
 So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb'?  
 'Ay, but I saved you — wolf defeated fox —  
 Wanting to pick your bones myself!' then, wolf  
 Has got the worst of it with goose for once.  
 I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds  
 (— No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart.)  
 And how you turn advantage to account 40  
 Here 's the example. Have I proved so wrong  
 In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged*'?  
 O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave  
 The old friend out at elbows — pooh, a thing  
 Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,  
 And you forget your generosity!  
 Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed  
 My laugh to that! First quarrel — nay, first faint  
 Pretence at taking umbrage — '*Down with debt,*  
*Both interest and principal!* — *The Club,* 50  
*Exposure and expulsion!* — *stamp me out!*'  
 That 's the magnanimous magnificent  
 Renunciation of advantage! Well,  
 But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?  
 Because your master, having made you know  
 Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,  
 Expound you women, still a mystery!  
 My pupil potted with a cloud on brow,  
 A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved:  
 Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world 60  
 As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I —  
 '*Quick rid him of that rubbish!* Clear the cloud,

*And set the heart a-pulsing!* — heart, this time :  
 'T was nothing but the head I doctored late  
 For ignorance of Man ; now heart 's to dose,  
 Palsied by over-palpitation due  
 To Woman-worship — so, to work at once  
 On first avowal of the patient's ache !  
 This morning you described your malady, —  
 How you dared love a piece of virtue — lost 70  
 To reason, as the upshot showed : for scorn  
 Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance ;  
 And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed  
 Her path — perfection, while forlorn you paced  
 The world that 's made for beasts like you and me.  
 My remedy was — tell the fool the truth !  
 Your paragon of purity had plumped  
 Into these arms at their first outspread — '*fallen*  
*My victim,*' she prefers to turn the phrase —  
 And, in exchange for that frank confidence, 80  
 Asked for my whole life present and to come —  
 Marriage : a thing uncovenanted for,  
 Never so much as put in question. Life —  
 Implied by marriage — throw that trifle in  
 And round the bargain off, no otherwise  
 Than if, when we played cards, because you won  
 My money you should also want my head !  
 That, I demurred to : we but played '*for love*' —  
 She won my love ; had she proposed for stakes  
 '*Marriage,*' — why, that 's for whist, a wiser game 90  
 Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,  
 And went her way. So far the story 's known,  
 The remedy 's applied, no farther : which  
 Here 's the sick man's first *honorarium* for —  
 Posting his medicine-monger at the Club !  
 That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee —

In gratitude for such munificence  
 I'm bound in common honesty to spare  
 No droplet of the draught: so, — pinch your nose,  
 Pull no wry faces! — drain it to the dregs! 100  
 I say '*She went off*' — '*went off*,' you subjoin,  
 '*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*  
*Sure to some convent: solitude and peace*  
*Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,*  
*With prayer and fasting.'* No, my sapient Sir!  
 Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself  
 To a prize-portent from the donkey-show  
 Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm  
 In clerical absurdity: since he,  
 Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick, 110  
 The candle-crotchets, nonsense which repays  
 When you've young ladies congregant, — but schools  
 The poor, — toils, moils and grinds the mill nor  
 means

To stop and munch one thistle in this life  
 Till next life smother him with roses: just  
 The parson for her purpose! Him she stroked  
 Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,  
 And on to back with saddle, — there he stood,  
 The serviceable beast who heard, believed  
 And meekly bowed him to the burden, — borne 120  
 Off in a canter to seclusion — ay,  
 The lady's lost! But had a friend of mine  
 — While friend he was — imparted his sad case  
 'To sympathizing counsellor, full soon  
 One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.  
 '*Don't fear!*' had followed reassuringly —  
 '*The lost will in due time turn up again,*  
*Probably just when, weary of the world,*  
*You think of nothing less than settling-down*

*To country life and golden days, beside* 130  
*A dearest best and brightest virtuousest*  
*Wife: who needs no more hope to bold her own*  
*Against the naughty-and-repentant — no,*  
*Than water-gruel against Roman punch!*  
 And as I prophesied, it proves! My youth,—  
 Just at the happy moment when, subdued  
 To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,  
 That town-life tires, that men should drop boys' play,  
 That property, position have, no doubt,  
 Their exigency with their privilege, 140  
 And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire  
 The double duty! — in, behold, there beams  
 Our long-lost lady, form and face complete!  
 And where's my moralizing pupil now,  
 Had not his master missed a train by chance?  
 But, by your side instead of whirled away,  
 How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,  
 Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!  
 Sudden and strange the meeting — improvised?  
 Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed! 150  
 But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint—  
 Assuredly from flesh. 'Tis you?' 'Myself.'  
 'Changed?' 'Changeless.' 'Then, what's earth  
     to me?' 'To me  
 What's heaven?' 'So, — thine!' 'And thine!'  
     'And likewise mine!'  
 Had laughed 'Amen' the devil, but for me  
 Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,  
 And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause —  
 Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal  
 At leisure and at pleasure, — lesson's price  
 Being, if you have skill to estimate, 160  
 — How say you? — I'm discharged my debt in full!

Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,  
 Unless I fare like that black majesty  
 A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.  
 Coasting along the Cape-side, he's becalmed  
 Off an uncharted bay, a novel town  
 Untouched at by the trader : here 's a chance !  
 Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,  
 Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy  
 Ship's cargo — being rich and having brought 170  
 A treasure ample for the purpose. See !  
 Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same  
 Wrapped round and round : its hulls, a multitude, —  
 Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth  
 All duly braced about with bark and board, —  
 Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be !  
 At length the peeling is accomplished, plain  
 The casket opens out its core, and lo  
 — A brand-new British silver sixpence — bid  
 That's ample for the Bank, — thinks majesty ! 180  
 You are the Captain ; call my sixpence cracked  
 Or copper ; *'what I've said is calumny ;*  
*The lady's spotless !* Then, I'll prove my words,  
 Or make you prove them true as truth — yourself,  
 Here, on the instant ! I'll not mince my speech,  
 Things at this issue. When she enters, then,  
 Make love to her ! No talk of marriage now —  
 The point-blank bare proposal ! Pick no phrase —  
 Prevent all misconception ! Soon you'll see  
 How different the tactics when she deals 190  
 With an instructed man, no longer boy  
 Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit !  
 Man, since you have instruction, blush no more !  
 Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,  
*'Tis simply now — demand and be possessed !*

Which means — you may possess — may strip the tree  
Of fruit desirable to make one wise.

More I nor wish nor want: your act 's your act,  
My teaching is but — there 's the fruit to pluck  
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance 200

In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect  
I bid a novice — pluck, suck, send sky-high  
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe  
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,  
Than this gold apple to my Hercules.

Were you no novice but proficient — then,  
Then, truly, I might prompt you — Touch and taste,  
Try flavor and be tired as soon as I!

Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,  
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow, 210  
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,  
Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,  
Such lore 's above you!

Here 's the lady back!

So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page  
And come to thank its last contributor?  
How kind and condescending! I retire  
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,  
And mar my own endeavor to make friends —  
You with him, him with you, and both with me!  
If I succeed — permit me to inquire 220  
Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-by, you  
know."

And out he goes.

VII.

She, face, form, bearing, one  
Superb *composure* —

“ He has told you all ?

Yes, he has told you all, your silence says —  
 What gives him, as he thinks the mastery  
 Over my body and my soul ! — has told  
 That instance, even, of their servitude  
 He now exacts of me ? A silent blush !  
 That 's well, though better would white ignorance  
 Beseem your brow, undesecrate before —  
 Ay, when I left you ! I too learn at last                    10  
 — Hideously learned as I seemed so late —  
 What sin may swell to. Yes, — I needed learn  
 That, when my prophet's rod became the snake  
 I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up  
 — Incorporate whatever serpentine  
 Falsehood and treason and unmanliness  
 Beslime earth's pavement : such the power of Hell,  
 And so beginning, ends no otherwise  
 The Adversary ! I was ignorant,  
 Blameworthy — if you will ; but blame I take            20  
 Nowise upon me as I ask myself  
 — *You* — how can you, whose soul I seemed to read  
 The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep  
 Even with him for consort ? I revolve  
 Much memory, pry into the looks and words  
 Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,  
 And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams  
 Only pure marble through my dusky past,  
 A dubious cranny where such poison-seed  
 Might harbor, nourish what should yield to-day            30  
 This dread ingredient for the cup I drink.  
 Do not I recognize and honor truth  
 In seeming ? — take your truth and for return,  
 Give you my truth, a no less precious gift ?  
*You loved me* : I believed you. I replied

— How could I other? *'I was not my own,'*  
 — No longer had the eyes to see, the ears  
 To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul  
 Now were another's. My own right in me,  
 For well or ill, consigned away — my face 40  
 Fronted the honest path, deflection whence  
 Had shamed me in the furtive backward look  
 At the late bargain — fit such chapman's phrase! —  
 As though — less hasty and more provident —  
 Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me  
 The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was  
 true,

I spared you — as I knew you then — one more  
 Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best  
 Buried away forever. Take it now 49  
 Its power to pain is past! Four years — that day —  
 Those limes that make the College avenue!  
 I would that — friend and foe — by miracle,  
 I had, that moment, seen into the heart  
 Of either, as I now am taught to see!  
 I do believe I should have straight assumed  
 My proper function, and sustained a soul,  
 Nor aimed at being just sustained myself  
 By some man's soul — the weaker woman's-want!  
 So had I missed the momentary thrill  
 Of finding me in presence of a god, 60  
 But gained the god's own feeling when he gives  
 Such thrill to what turns life from death before.  
*'Gods many and Lords many,'* says the Book:  
 You would have yielded up your soul to me  
 — Not to the false god who has burned its clay  
 In his own image. I had shed my love  
 Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,  
 Not sent up a wild vapor to the sun



That drinks and then disperses. Both of us  
 Blameworthy, — I first meet my punishment — 70  
 And not so hard to bear. I breathe again !  
 Forth from those arms' entwining leprosy  
 At last I struggle — uncontaminate :  
 Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast  
 That 's all one plague-spot ? Did you love me once ?  
 Then take love's last and best return ! I think,  
 Womanliness means only motherhood ;  
 All love begins and ends there, — roams enough,  
 But, having run the circle, rests at home.  
 Why is your expiation yet to make ? 80  
 Pull shame with your own hands from your own head  
 Now, — never wait the slow envelopment  
 Submitted to by unelastic age !  
 One fierce throe frees the sapling : flake on flake  
 Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.  
 Your heart retains its vital warmth — or why  
 That blushing reassurance ? Blush, young blood !  
 Break from beneath this icy premature  
 Captivity of wickedness — I warn 89  
 Back, in God's name ! No fresh encroachment here !  
 This May breaks all to bud — no Winter now !  
 Friend, we are both forgiven ! Sin no more !  
 I am past sin now, so shall you become !  
 Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,  
 My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.  
 He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep  
 The wicked counsel, — and assent might seem ;  
 But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks  
 The idle dream-pact. You would die — not dare  
 Confirm your dream-resolve, — nay, find the word 100  
 That fits the deed to bear the light of day !  
 Say *I have justly judged you !* then farewell

To blushing — nay, it ends in smiles, not tears !  
Why tears now ? I have justly judged, thank God !”

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,  
— Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

“I don't know what he wrote — how should I ? Nor  
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,  
He chose to somehow write — mistakenly  
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe 110  
My purpose put before you fair and plain  
Would need annoy so much ; but there 's my luck —  
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more  
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought !  
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you read  
Right what he set down wrong ? He said — let 's  
think !

Ay, so ! — he did begin by telling heaps  
Of tales about you. Now, you see — suppose  
Any one told me — my own mother died  
Before I knew her — told me — to his cost ! — 120  
Such tales about my own dead mother : why,  
You would not wonder surely if I knew,  
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,  
Would you ? No reason 's wanted in the case.  
So with you ! In they burnt on me, his tales,  
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,  
Make captive any visitor and scream  
All sorts of stories of their keeper — he 's  
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat,  
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same ; 130  
Sane people soon see through the gibberish !  
I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere  
A life of shame — I can't distinguish more —

Married or single—how, don't matter much :  
 Shame which himself had caused — that point was  
 clear,

That fact confessed — that thing to hold and keep.

Oh, and he added some absurdity

— That you were here to make me — ha, ha, ha ! —

Still love you, still of mind to die for you,

Ha, ha — as if that needed mighty pains ! 140

Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself

— What I am, what I am not, in the eye

Of the world, is what I never cared for much.

Fool then or no fool, not one single word

In the whole string of lies did I believe,

But this — this only — if I choke, who cares ? —

I believe somehow in your purity

Perfect as ever ! Else what use is God ?

He is God, and work miracles He can !

Then, what shall I do ? Quite as clear, my course ! 150

They've got a thing they call their Labyrinth

I' the garden yonder : and my cousin played

A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep

Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge ;

And there might I be staying now, stock-still,

But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose

And so straight pushed my path through let and stop

And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,

But well behind my back the prison-bars

In sorry plight enough, I promise you ! 160

So here : I won my way to truth through lies —

Said, as I saw light, — if her shame be shame

I'll rescue and redeem her, — shame's no shame ?

Then, I'll avenge, protect — redeem myself

The stupidest of sinners ! Here I stand !

*Dear, — let me once dare call you so, — you said*

Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,  
 Such things and such ! Ay, dear, and what ought I ?  
 You were revealed to me : where 's gratitude,  
 Where 's memory even, where the gain of you 170  
 Discernible in my low after-life  
 Of fancied consolation ? why, no horse  
 Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch  
 Mere thistles like a donkey ! I missed you,  
 And in your place found — him, made him my love,  
 Ay, did I, — by this token, that he taught  
 So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God knows  
 Whether I bow me to the dust enough ! . . .  
 To marry — yes, my cousin here ! I hope  
 That was a master-stroke ! Take heart of hers, 180  
 And give her hand of mine with no more heart  
 Than now you see upon this brow I strike !  
 What atom of a heart do I retain  
 Not all yours ? Dear, you know it ! Easily  
 May she accord me pardon when I place  
 My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,  
 Since uttermost indignity is spared —  
 Mere marriage and no love ! And all this time  
 Not one word to the purpose ! Are you free ?  
 Only wait ! only let me serve — deserve 190  
 Where you appoint and how you see the good !  
 I have the will — perhaps the power — at least  
 Means that have power against the world. For time —  
 Take my whole life for your experiment !  
 If you are bound — in marriage, say — why, still,  
 Still, sure, there 's something for a friend to do,  
 Outside ? A mere well-wisher, understand !  
 I 'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,  
 Swing it wide open to let you and him  
 Pass freely, — and you need not look, much less 200

Fling me a '*Thank you — are you there, old friend?*'  
 Don't say that even : I should drop like shot !  
 So I feel now at least : some day, who knows ?  
 After no end of weeks and months and years  
 You might smile '*I believe you did your best !*'  
 And that shall make my heart leap — leap such leap  
 As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there !  
 Ah, there 's just one thing more ! How pale you look !  
 Why ? Are you angry ? If there 's, after all,  
 Worst come to worst — if still there somehow be 210  
 The shame — I said was no shame, — none, I  
 swear ! —

In that case, if my hand and what it holds, —  
 My name, — might be your safeguard now — at  
 once —

Why, here 's the hand — you have the heart ! Of  
 course —

No cheat, no binding you, because I 'm bound,  
 To let me off probation by one day,  
 Week, month, year, lifetime ! Prove as you propose !  
 Here 's the hand with the name to take or leave !  
 That 's all — and no great piece of news, I hope ! "

"Give me the hand, then ! " she cries hastily. 220  
 "Quick, now ! I hear his footstep ! "

Hand in hand

The couple face him as he enters, stops  
 Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away  
 Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

"So, you accept him ? "

"Till us death do part !

"No longer ? Come, that 's right and rational ! "  
*I fancied there was power in common sense,*

But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well —  
 At last each understands the other, then ?  
 Each drops disguise, then ? So, at supper-time 230  
 These masquerading people doff their gear,  
 Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress  
 Her stiff-starched bib and tucker, — make-believe  
 That only bothers when, ball-business done,  
 Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise*.  
 Just so has each of us sage three abjured  
 His and her moral pet particular  
 Pretension to superiority,  
 And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke !  
 Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed 240  
 To live and die together — for a month,  
 Discretion can award no more ! Depart  
 From whatsoe'er the calm sweet solitude  
 Selected — Paris not improbably —  
 At month's end, when the honeycomb's left wax,  
 — You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold  
 Enough to find your village boys and girls  
 In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May  
 To — what's the phrase ? — Christmas-come-never-  
 mas !  
 You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear 250  
 Ere Spring-time, that's the ring-time, lose one leaf,  
 And — not without regretful smack of lip  
 The while you wipe it free of honey-smear —  
 Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,  
 Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink —  
 Master of hounds, gay-coated dine — nor die  
 Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,  
 And sons at Christ Church ! As for me, — ah me,  
 I abdicate — retire on my success,  
 Four years well occupied in teaching youth 260

— My son and daughter the exemplary !  
 Time for me to retire now, having placed  
 Proud on their pedestal the pair : in turn,  
 Let them do homage to their master ! You, —  
 Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim  
 Sufficiently your gratitude : you paid  
 The *bonorarium*, the ten thousand pounds  
 To purpose, did you not ? I told you so !  
 And you, but, bless me, why so pale — so faint  
 At influx of good fortune ? Certainly, 270  
 No matter how or why or whose the fault,  
 I save your life — save it, nor less nor more !  
 You blindly were resolved to welcome death  
 In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole  
 Of his, the prig with all the preachments ! You  
 Installed as nurse and matron to the crones  
 And wenches, while there lay a world outside  
 Like Paris (which again I recommend)  
 In company and guidance of — first, this, 279  
 Then — all in good time — some new friend as fit —  
 What if I were to say, some fresh myself,  
 As I once figured ? Each dog has his day,  
 And mine's at sunset : what should old dog do  
 But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood ?  
 Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth  
 Frisk it in brilliance ! But don't fear ! Discreet,  
 I shall pretend to no more recognize  
 My quondam pupils than the doctor nods  
 When certain old acquaintances may cross  
 His path in Park, or sit down prim beside 290  
 His plate at dinner-table : tip nor wink  
 Scares patients he has put, for reason good,  
 Under restriction, — maybe, talked sometimes  
 Of *douche* or horsewhip to, — for why ? because

The gentleman would crazily declare  
 His best friend was — Iago! Ay, and worse —  
 The lady, all at once grown lunatic,  
 In suicidal monomania vowed,  
 To save her soul, she needs must starve herself!  
 They 're cured now, both, and I tell nobody. 300  
 Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you  
 Can spare, — without unclasping plighted troth, —  
 At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do —  
 Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards — it gripes  
 The precious Album fast — and prudently!  
 As well obliterate the record there  
 On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!  
 Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,  
 What if all three of us contribute each  
 A line to that prelusive fragment, — help 310  
 The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down  
 Dumbfounded at such unforeseen success?  
 'Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot'  
 You begin — *place aux dames!* I'll prompt you then!  
 'Here do I take the good the gods allot!'  
 Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!  
 'Here does my lord in full discharge his sbot!'  
 Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . ."

"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar.  
 What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece! 320  
 Authorship has the alteration-itch!  
 No, I protest against erasure. Read,  
 My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly  
 read  
 'Before us death do part,' what made you mine  
 And made me yours — the marriage-license here!  
 Decide if he is like to mend the same!"



And so the lady, white to ghastliness,  
 Manages somehow to display the page  
 With left-hand only, while the right retains 329  
 The other hand, the young man's, — dreaming-drunk  
 He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,  
 Eyes wide, mouth open, — half the idiot's stare  
 And half the prophet's insight, — holding tight,  
 All the same, by his one fact in the world —  
 The lady's right-hand : he but seems to read —  
 Does not, for certain ; yet, how understand  
 Unless he reads ?

So, understand he does,  
 For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads  
 Aloud that license — or that warrant, say.

“ “ One against two — and two that urge their odds 340  
 To uttermost — I needs must try resource !  
 Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn  
 Body and soul : you spurned and safely spurned  
 So you had spared me the superfluous taunt  
 “ Prostration means no power to stand erect,  
 Stand, trampling on who trampled — prostrate now ! ”  
 So, with my other fool-foe : I was fain  
 Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,  
 And him the infection gains, he too must needs  
 Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so ! 350  
 Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.  
 He loves you ; he demands your love : both know  
 What love means in my language. Love him then !  
 Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt :  
 Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby  
 Likewise delivering from me yourself !  
 For, besitate — much more, refuse consent —

*I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat  
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!  
Consent — you stop my mouth, the only way.* 360

“ I did well, trusting instinct : knew your hand  
Had never joined with his in fellowship  
Over this pact of infamy. You known —  
As he was known through every nerve of me.  
Therefore I ‘ *stopped his mouth the only way* ’  
But *my way* ! none was left for you, my friend —  
The loyal — near, the loved one ! No — no — no !  
Threaten ? Chastise ? The coward would but quail.  
Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake !  
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head, 370  
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.  
His malice had redoubled — not on me  
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire —  
But on poor unsuspecting innocence ;  
And, — victim, — to turn executioner  
Also — that feat effected, forky tongue  
Had done indeed its office ! One snake’s ‘ *mouth* ’  
Thus ‘ *open* ’ — how could mortal ‘ *stop it* ’ ? ”

“ So ! ”

A tiger-flash — yell, spring, and scream : halloo ! 379  
Death’s out and on him, has and holds him — ugh !  
But *ne trucidet coram populo*  
*Juvenis senem !* Right the Horatian rule !  
There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass !

#### VIII.

The youth is somehow by the lady’s side.  
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.  
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

“ And that was good but useless. Had I lived  
 The danger was to dread : but, dying now —  
 Himself would hardly become talkative,  
 Since talk no more means torture. Fools — what  
 fools

These wicked men are ! Had I borne four years,  
 Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,  
 Inured me to the consciousness of life 10  
 Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply, —  
 But that I bore about me, for prompt use  
 At urgent need, the thing that ‘ *stops the mouth* ’  
 And stays the venom ? Since such need was now  
 Or never, — how should use not follow need ?  
 Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life  
 By virtue of the license — warrant, say,  
 That blackens yet this Album — white again,  
 Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page !  
 Now, let me write the line of supplement, 20  
 As counselled by my foe there : ‘ *each a line !* ’ ”

And she does falteringly write to end.

*“ I die now through the villain who lies dead,  
 Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,  
 So, my defender slew him. God protect  
 The right ! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.  
 Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent  
 In blessing my defender from my soul ! ”*

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,  
30  
 Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,  
 And is indeed half song though meant for speech  
 Muttered in time to motion — stir of heart

That unsubduably must bubble forth  
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

“ All ’s ended and all ’s over ! Verdict found  
‘ *Not guilty* ’ — prisoner forthwith set free,  
Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard !  
Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,  
At last appeased, benignant ! ‘ *This young man —  
Hem — has the young man’s foibles but no fault.* 40  
*He’s virgin soil — a friend must cultivate.  
I think no plant called “ love ” grows wild — a friend  
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit !*  
Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief —  
She’ll want to hide her face with presently !  
Good-by then ! ‘ *Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,  
Addio !* ’ Now, was ever such mistake —  
Ever such foolish ugly omen ? Pshaw !  
Wagner, beside ! ‘ *Amo te solo, te  
Solo amai !* ’ That ’s worth fifty such ! 50  
But, mum, the grave face at the opened door ! ”

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks  
Diamond and damask, — cheeks so white erewhile  
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear  
Chased on reflection ! — pausing, taps discreet ;  
And then, to give herself a countenance,  
Before she comes upon the pair inside,  
Loud — the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line —  
“ ‘ *Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot !* ’  
Open the door ! ”

No : let the curtain fall !

## THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

1878.

I.

SUCH a starved bank of moss  
Till that May-morn,  
Blue ran the flash across :  
Violets were born !

II.

Sky — what a scowl of cloud  
Till, near and far,  
Ray on ray split the shroud :  
Splendid, a star !

III.

World — how it walled about  
Life with disgrace  
Till God's own smile came out :  
That was thy face !

10

I.

“ FAME ! ” Yes, I said it and you read it. First,  
Praise the good log-fire ! Winter howls without.  
Crowd closer, let us ! Ha, the secret nursed  
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout  
With copper where the clamp was, — how the burst  
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder ! Spout  
Thy splenddest — a minute and no more ?  
*So soon again all sobered as before ?*

II.

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke  
 Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed! 10  
 Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak  
 Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed  
 Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,  
 As redly up and out and off they reeled  
 Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks  
 From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III.

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used, —  
 You now, in childish days or rather nights, —  
 As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused 19  
 By that old nurse-taught game which gave the sprites  
 Each one his title and career, — confused  
 Belief 't was all long over with the flights  
 From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,  
 And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV.

New long bright life! and happy chance befell —  
 That I know — when some prematurely lost  
 Child of disaster bore away the bell  
 From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed  
 Never before my chimney broke the spell!  
 Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost, 30  
 While — never mind Who was it cumbered earth —  
 Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V.

Well, try a variation of the game!  
 Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.  
 There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,  
 That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk

232 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

Was saturate with — ask the chloride's name  
 From somebody who knows ! I shall not sulk  
 If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass  
 Its life, I thought was fed on copperas. 40

VI.

Anyhow, there they flutter ! What may be  
 The style and prowess of that purple one ?  
 Who is the hero other eyes shall see  
 Than yours and mine ? That yellow, deep to dun —  
 Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we  
 But those unborn are to get warmth by ! Son  
 O' the coal, — as Job and Hebrew name a spark, —  
 What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark ?

VII.

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still  
 That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours 50  
 The glimpse repaying astronomic skill  
 Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent  
 powers  
 Constellate proudly, — swords, scrolls, harps, that fill  
 The vulgar eye to surfeit, — found best flowers  
 Hid deepest in the dark, — named unplucked grace  
 Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face !

VIII.

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,  
 But I know ! flash thou forth, and figure bold,  
 Calm and columnar as yon flame I view !  
 Oh and I bid thee, — to whom fortune doled 60  
 Scantly all other gifts out — bicker blue,  
 Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled  
 Flake-brilliance ! Not my fault if these were shown,  
*Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.*

IX.

No ! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere  
 Stripling's amusement : manhood's sport be grave !  
 Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,  
 Their boldness and their brightness could not save  
 (In some old night of time on some lone drear  
 Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave) 70  
 — Save from ignoble exit into smoke,  
 Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke !

X.

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift  
 In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,  
 We both know well ! Where uncouth tribes made shift  
 Long since to just keep life in, billows dash  
 Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift  
 Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash  
 Though they have built the serviceable town 79  
 Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI.

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts  
 Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub  
 'To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts  
 Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub  
 The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts  
 Their promontory's breadth with salt : all stub  
 Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife  
 To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII.

And what life ! Here was, from the world to choose,  
 The Druids' chosen chief of homes : they reared  
 — Only their women, — mid the slush and ooze 91  
 Of yon low islet, — to their sun, revered



234 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

In strange stone guise, — a temple. May-dawn dews  
Saw the old structure levelled ; when there peered  
May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more  
Up towered the new pile perfect as before :

XIII.

Seeing that priestesses — and all were such —  
Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,  
Each alike helping — well, if not too much !  
For, mid their eagerness to outstrip day 100  
And get work done, if any loosed her clutch  
And let a single stone drop, straight a prey  
Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,  
By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

XIV.

And still so much remains of that gray cult,  
That even now, of nights, do women steal  
To the sole Menhir standing, and insult  
The antagonistic church-spire by appeal  
To power discrowned in vain, since each adult  
Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal 110  
Whatever plague no priestly help can cure :  
Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure !

XV.

Nay more : on May-morns, that primeval rite  
Of temple-building, with its punishment  
For rash precipitation, lingers, spite  
Of all remonstrance ; vainly are they shent,  
Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,  
Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent :  
Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs  
From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs. 120

XVI.

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door  
 Sing unintelligible words to tunes  
 As obsolete : " scraps of Druidic lore,"  
 Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes  
 Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.  
 Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes !  
 They serve my purpose, which is but to show  
 Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII.

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there  
 By fancy from the log that ends its days 130  
 Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,  
 On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze  
 We two crouch round so closely, bidding care  
 Keep outside with the snow-storm ? Something says  
 " Fit time for story-telling ! " I begin —  
 Why not at Croisic, port we first put in ?

XVIII.

Anywhere serves : for point me out the place  
 Wherever man has made himself a home,  
 And there I find the story of our race  
 In little, just at Croisic as at Rome. 140  
 What matters the degree ? the kind I trace.  
 Druids their temple, Christians have their dome :  
 So with mankind ; and Croisic, I'll engage,  
 With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX.

No doubt, men vastly differ : and we need  
 Some strange exceptional benevolence  
 Of nature's sunshine to develop seed  
 So well, in the less-favored clime, that thence

236 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

We may discern how shrub means tree indeed 149  
Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.  
Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks  
With beasts or gods : stove-forced, give warmth the  
thanks !

xx.

While, is there any ice-checked ? Such shall learn  
I am thankworthy, who propose to slake  
His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn  
Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake  
No memories of what is harsh and stern  
In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake  
The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps  
Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps. 160

xxi.

Take these two, see, each outbreak, — spirt and spirt  
Of fire from our brave billet's either edge  
Which — call maternal Croisic ocean-girt !  
These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.  
One flames fierce gules, its feebler rival — vert,  
Heralds would tell you : heroes, I allege,  
They both were : soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,  
Lawyers, physicians — guess what gods or beasts !

xxii.

None of them all, but — poets, if you please ! 169  
“What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,  
Did two among the aborigines  
Of that rough region pass the ungracious time  
Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,  
The songs forbidden a serener clime ?  
Or had they universal audience — that 's  
To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz ?”

XXIII.

Open your ears ! Each poet in his day  
 Had such a mighty moment of success  
 As pinnacled him straight, in full display,  
 For the whole world to worship — nothing less ! 18c  
 Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray ?  
 And did not Paris, for one moment — yes,  
 Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,  
 One at a time, a century between ?

XXIV.

And yet you never heard their names ! Assist,  
 Clio, Historic Muse, while I record  
 Great deeds ! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist  
 And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord  
 Of day, one moment ! Hear the annalist  
 Tell a strange story, true to the least word ! 190  
 At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten  
 Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV.

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme  
 — Appropriate appellation ! noble birth  
 And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom  
 Was “ Better do than say ” ! In Croisic’s dearth  
 Why prison his career while Christendom  
 Lay open to reward acknowledged worth ?  
 He therefore left it at the proper age  
 And got to be the Prince of Condé’s page. 200

XXVI.

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called “ The  
 Duke,”  
 — Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,

238 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

(As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,  
 Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,  
 Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could look  
 For issue) — failing Louis of so rare  
 A godsend, it was natural the Prince  
 Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor wince.

XXVII.

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth 209  
 Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump almost  
 To bursting, — would the brothers, childless both,  
 Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost —  
 Condé, called "Duke" and "Next King," nothing  
 loth  
 Awaited his appointment to the post,  
 And wiled away the time, as best he might,  
 Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII.

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn  
 From cities where a whisper breeds offence,  
 He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn  
 Testify to first stir of Providence ; 220  
 And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,  
 There wanted not a poet to dispense  
 Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,  
 Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX.

A poet born and bred, his very sire  
 A poet also, author of a piece  
 Printed and published, "Ladies — their attire":  
 Therefore the son, just born at his decease,

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC. 239

Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,  
And kept it, yielding moderate increase 230  
Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much  
Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

xxx.

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind !)  
Rubbish not wholly without value, though,  
Being to compliment the Duke designed  
And bring the complimenter credit so, —  
Pleasure with profit happily combined.  
Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till — lo,  
This happened, as he sat in an alcove  
Elaborating rhyme for “love” — *not* “dove.” 240

xxxI.

He was alone : silence and solitude  
Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,  
Nature — not our new picturesque and rude,  
But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground —  
Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued  
With these, he sat absorbed in one profound  
Excogitation “ Were it best to hint  
Or boldly boast ‘ She loves me, — Araminte ? ’ ”

xxxII.

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight  
Almost, so close to eyes ; then, quick on flash, 250  
Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright  
Where René sat a-rhyming : with huge crash  
Of marble into atoms infinite —  
Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash  
The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place :  
One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

## XXXIII.

So, when the horrible confusion loosed  
 Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,  
 Seeing and hearing by degrees induced  
 Conviction what he felt was life, not death — 260  
 His fluttered faculties came back to roost  
 One after one, as fowls do : ay, beneath,  
 About his very feet there, lay in dust  
 Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

## XXXIV.

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing  
 But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,  
 A ducal crown — which meant “ Now Duke : Next,  
 King ” ?  
 Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes  
 Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling  
 Prostrates a giant ; so can pulverize 270  
 Marble pretension — how much more, make moult  
 A peacock-prince his plume — God's thunderbolt.

## XXXV.

That was enough for René, that first fact  
 Thus flashed into him. Up he looked : all blue  
 And bright the sky above ; earth firm, compact  
 Beneath his footing, lay apparent too ;  
 Opposite stood the pillar : nothing lacked  
 There, but the Duke's crown : see, its fragments  
 strew  
 The earth, — about his feet lie atoms fine  
 Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line ! 280

XXXVI.

So, for the moment, all the universe  
 Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him, —  
 Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,  
 Of one and the same value, — to the brim  
 Flooded with truth for better or for worse, —  
 He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,  
 Keeping its place on table : not a dint  
 Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII.

And over the neat crowquill calligraph  
 His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox 290  
 Tramples a flower-bed in a garden, — laugh  
 You may! — so does not he, whose quick heart  
 knocks  
 Audibly at his breast : an epitaph  
 On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,  
 He might be penning in a wild dismay,  
 Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII.

And what is it so terribly he pens,  
 Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,  
 Hearts, darts," and all his day's *divinior mens*  
 Judged necessary to a perfect style ? 300  
 Little recks René, with a breast to cleanse,  
 Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile :  
 Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince  
 (Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt—the  
 Prince.



## XXXIX.

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not  
 more  
 To life's end ! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be ?  
 Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before  
 Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,  
 Take its proud station there ! Let France adore  
 No longer an illusive mock-sun — thee — 310  
 But keep her homage for Sol's self, about  
 To rise and put pretenders to the rout !

## XL.

"What ? France so God-abandoned that her root  
 Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,  
 Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot  
 Greenly as ever ? Nature, though benign,  
 Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.  
 In store for such is punishment condign :  
 Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,  
 So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world !" 320

## XLI.

Which penned — some forty lines to this effect —  
 Our René folds his paper, marches brave  
 Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,  
 Triumphant, an emancipated slave.  
 There stands the Prince. "How now ? My Duke's  
 crown wrecked ?  
 What may this mean ?" The answer René gave  
 Was — handing him the verses, with the due  
*Incline of body* : "Sir, God's word to you !"

XLII.

The Prince read, paled, was silent ; all around,  
 The courtier-company, to whom he passed 330  
 The paper, read, in equal silence bound.  
 René grew also by degrees aghast  
 At his own fit of courage — palely found  
 Way of retreat from that pale presence : classed  
 Once more among the cony-kind. “ Oh, son,  
 It is a feeble folk ! ” saith Solomon.

XLIII.

Vainly he apprehended evil : since,  
 When, at the year’s end, even as foretold,  
 Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince  
 Of that long-craved mere visionary gold, 340  
 ’T was no fit time for envy to evince  
 Malice, be sure ! The timidest grew bold :  
 Of all that courtier-company not one  
 But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV.

And all sorts and conditions that stood by  
 At René’s burning moment, bright escape  
 Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.  
 Which witness took the customary shape  
 Of verse ; a score of poets in full cry 349  
 Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,  
 Soon Paris caught the infection ; gaining strength,  
 How could it fail to reach the Court at length ?

XLV.

“ O poet ! ” smiled King Louis, “ and besides,  
 O prophet ! Sure, by miracle announced,  
 My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides  
 Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be trounced

For irreligion : since the fool derides  
 Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced  
 Exactly on the moment I should lift  
 Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, ' God's gift ! ' 360

## XLVI.

" So call the boy ! and call this bard and seer  
 By a new title ! him I raise to rank  
 Of ' Royal Poet : ' poet without peer !  
 Whose fellows only have themselves to thank  
 If humbly they must follow in the rear  
 My René. He 's the master : they must clank  
 Their chains of song, confessed his slaves ; for why ?  
 They poetize, while he can prophesy ! "

## XLVII.

So said, so done ; our René rose august,  
 " The Royal Poet ; " straightway put in type 370  
 His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just  
 Procedure) added, — now that time was ripe  
 For proving friends did well his word to trust, —  
 Those attestations, turned to lyre or pipe,  
 Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell  
 The Dauphin's birth : friends trusted, and did well.

## XLVIII.

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,  
 Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed  
 The portrait to his book : a crown of bay 379  
 Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed ;  
 And Latin verses, lovely in their way,  
 Described him as " the biforked hill betwixt :  
 Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,  
 Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump. "

XLIX.

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus long  
 — The red fire ? That 's the reason must excuse  
 My letting flicker René's prophet-song  
 No longer ; for its pertinacious hues  
 Must fade before its fellow joins the throng  
 Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues 390  
 To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,  
 Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks !

L.

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,  
 Fury of favor, Royal Poetship,  
 Prophetship, book, verse, picture — thereof came  
 — Nothing ! That 's why I would not let outstrip  
 Red his green rival flamelet : just the same  
 Ending in smoke waits both ! In vain we rip  
 The past, no further faintest trace remains  
 Of René to reward our pious pains. 400

LI.

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed  
 At Croisic. " Who may be this glorified  
 Mortal unheard-of hitherto ? " amazed  
 That person asked the owner by his side,  
 Who proved as ignorant. The question raised  
 Provoked inquiry ; key by key was tried  
 On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew  
 The wards at one key's touch, which key was — Who ?

LII.

The other famous poet ! Wait thy turn,  
 Thou green, our red's competitor ! Enough 410  
 Just now to note 't was he that itched to learn  
 (A hundred years ago) how fate could puff

246 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn  
To suds so big a bubble in some huff:  
Since green too found red's portrait, — having heard  
Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII.

And he with zeal addressed him to the task  
Of hunting out, by all and any means,  
— Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask  
Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens 420  
And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask!  
Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens  
The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips  
Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV.

After a vast expenditure of pains,  
Our second poet found the prize he sought:  
Urged in his search by something that restrains  
From undue triumph famed ones who have fought,  
Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains: 429  
Something that tells such — dear is triumph bought  
If it means only basking in the midst  
Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV.

For, what did searching find at last but this?  
Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem  
To think I heard one old De Chevaye is  
Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam  
Of light from out the dark proved not amiss  
To track, by correspondence on the theme;  
And soon the twilight broadened into day,  
For thus to question answered De Chevaye. 440

LVI.

“ True it is, I did once possess the works  
 You want account of — works — to call them so, —  
 Comprised in one small book : the volume lurks  
 (Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)  
 ’Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks  
 Still to remember, because long ago  
 That and my other rare shelf-occupants  
 Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII.

“ Yet of that book one strange particular 449  
 Still stays in mind with me ” — and thereupon  
 Followed the story. “ Few the poems are ;  
 The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,  
 And sundry witnesses from near and far  
 That here at least was prophesying done  
 By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,  
 Before the thing he prophesied about.”

LVIII.

That’s all he knew, and all the poet learned,  
 And all that you and I are like to hear  
 Of René ; since not only book is burned  
 But memory extinguished, — nay, I fear, 460  
 Portrait is gone too : nowhere I discerned  
 A trace of it at Croisic. “ Must a tear  
 Needs fall for that ? ” you smile. “ How fortune fares  
 With such a mediocrity, who cares ? ”

LIX.

Well, I care — intimately care to have  
 Experience how a human creature felt  
 In after-life, who bore the burden grave  
 Of certainly believing God had dealt

248 THE TWO POETS OF CROÏSIC.

For once directly with him : did not rave  
— A maniac, did not find his reason melt 470  
— An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,  
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX.

How many problems that one fact would solve !  
An ordinary soul, no more, no less,  
About whose life earth's common sights revolve,  
On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,  
This fact — God tasks him, and will not absolve  
Task's negligent performer ! Can you guess  
How such a soul, — the task performed to point, —  
Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint ? 480

LXI.

Does he stand stock-like henceforth ? or proceed  
Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,  
Down-trampling vulgar hindrance ? — as the reed  
Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind will  
Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it speed  
Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil  
Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice  
Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice.

LXII.

I think no such direct plain truth consists 489  
With actual sense and thought and what they take  
To be the solid walls of life : mere mists —  
How such would, at that truth's first piercing, break  
Into the nullity they are ! — slight lists  
Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake  
Of some mock-mistress, mimic war : laid low  
At trumpet-blast, there's shown the world, one foe !

LXIII.

No, we must play the pageant out, observe  
 The tourney-regulations, and regard  
 Success — to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,  
 Failure — to break no bones yet fall on sward ; 500  
 Must prove we have — not courage ? well then, —  
 nerve !  
 And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award —  
 Be warranted as promising to wield  
 Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV.

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps  
 Which tell us counterfeited truths — these same  
 Are — sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps ?  
 — Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim  
 That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,  
 To fail effectless from the soul it came 510  
 As if to fix its own, but simply smote  
 And startled to vague beauty more remote ?

LXV.

So do we gain enough — yet not too much —  
 Acquaintance with that outer element  
 Wherein there's operation (call it such !)  
 Quite of another kind than we the pent  
 On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch  
 Lights up at the least chink : let roof be rent —  
 How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,  
 Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm ! 520

LXVI.

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick  
 Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare



250 THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

Into oblivion was impolitic ?

No doubt his soul became at once aware  
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick  
Is poor employment : human praises scare  
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet  
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII.

There 's our first famous poet. Step thou forth 529  
Second consummate songster ! See, the tongue  
Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth  
In yellow, purple mixed its green among,  
No pure and simple resin from the North,  
But composite with virtues that belong  
To Southern culture ! Love not more than hate  
Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII.

Prepare to witness a combustion rich  
And riotously splendid, far beyond  
Poor René's lambent little streamer which  
Only played candle to a Court grown fond 540  
By baby-birth : this soared to such a pitch,  
Alternately such colors doffed and donned,  
That when I say it dazzled Paris — please  
Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees !

LXIX.

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,  
Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,  
Whose birth that century ended which began  
By similar bestowment on our earth

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC. 251

Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan 549  
The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth —  
Not Paris in its plenitude — suffice  
To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX.

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein  
Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirits :  
In verses of society had lain  
His talent chiefly ; but the Muse asserts  
Privilege most by treating with disdain  
Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts  
Spasmodically forth. Have people time  
And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme ? 560

LXXI.

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch  
Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell  
Of admiration : welded lines with clinch  
Of ending word and word, to every belle  
In Croisic's bounds ; these, brisk as any finch,  
He twittered till his fame had reached as well  
Guérande as Batz ; but there fame stopped, for —  
curse  
On fortune — outside lay the universe !

LXXII.

That's Paris. Well, — why not break bounds, and  
send  
Song onward till it echo at the gates 570  
Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,  
And end too, seeing that success there sates

The soul which hungers most for fame ? Why spend  
 A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's  
 Decree, there happens to be just the prize  
 Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize ?

## LXXIII.

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self  
 Proposes to what bard shall best indite  
 A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,  
 The Art of Navigation, steered aright, 580  
 Has, in our last king's reign, — the lucky elf, —  
 Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,  
 And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees  
 The subject's crowd of capabilities !

## LXXIV.

Neptune and Amphitrité ! Thetis, who  
 Is either Tethys or as good — both tag !  
 Triton can shove along a vessel too :  
 It's Virgil ! Then the winds that blow or lag, —  
 De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois ! Toulouse blew 590  
 Longest, we reckon : he must puff the flag  
 To fullest outflare ; while our lacking nymph  
 Be Anne of Austria, Regent o'er the lymph !

## LXXV.

Promised, performed ! Since *irritabilis gens*  
 Holds of the feverish impotence that strives  
 To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's  
 Scratching itself on paper ; placid lives,  
 Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens* :  
 Bees brood above the honey in their hives ;  
 Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl, —  
 Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul ! 600

LXXVI.

To Paris with the product ! This despatched,  
 One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure  
 Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched  
 Away perforce the itch that knows no cure  
 But daily paper-friction : more than matched  
 His first feat by a second — tribute pure  
 And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice  
 Should peal with one accord " Be Paul our choice ! "

LXXVII.

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane  
 And sound Tribunal, delegates august 610  
 Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train —  
 Whom every poetaster tries to thrust  
 From where, high-throned, they dominate the Seine :  
 Fruitless endeavor, — fail it shall and must !  
 Whereof in witness have not one and all  
 The Forty voices pealed " Our Choice be Paul " ?

LXXVIII.

'Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack  
 For human expectation ! Scarcely ink  
 Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back 620  
 Rejected, shamed ! Some other poet's clink  
 " Thetis and Tethys " had seduced the pack  
 Of pedants to declare perfection's pink  
 A singularly poor production. " Whew !  
 The Forty are stark fools, I always knew. "

LXXIX.

First fury over (for Paul's race — to-wit,  
 Brain-vibrios — wriggle clear of protoplasm  
 Into minute life that 's one fury-fit),  
 " These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm

Comports with what should counterbalance it — 629  
 Some knowledge of the world ! No doubt, orgasm  
 Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands  
 Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands !

## LXXX.

“ Verse must be cared for at this early stage,  
 Handled, nay dandled even. I should play  
 Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,  
 I meekly let these dotards frown away  
 My bantling from the rightful heritage  
 Of smiles and kisses ! Let the public say  
 If it be worthy praises or rebukes,  
 My poem, from these Forty old perukes ! ” 640

## LXXXI.

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace  
 With no less than the Chevalier La Roque, —  
 Eminent in those days for pride of place,  
 Seeing he had it in his power to block  
 The way or smooth the road to all the race  
 Of literators trudging up to knock  
 At Fame’s exalted temple-door — for why ?  
 He edited the Paris “ Mercury ” : —

## LXXXII.

By this friend’s help the Chevalier receives  
 Paul’s poem, prefaced by the due appeal 650  
 To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves  
 A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal  
 With case so customary — turns the leaves,  
 Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal —  
 Then brightens up the critic’s brow deep-lined.  
 “ The thing may be so cleverly declined ! ”

LXXXIII.

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,  
 Dip and indite ! “ Sir, gratitude immense  
 For this true draught from the Pierian rill !  
 Our Academic clodpoles must be dense 660  
 Indeed to stand unirrigated still.  
 No less, we critics dare not give offence  
 To grandees like the Forty : while we mock  
 We grin and bear. So, here’s your piece ! La  
 Roque.”

LXXXIV.

“ There now ! ” cries Paul : “ the fellow can’t  
 avoid  
 Confessing that my piece deserves the palm ;  
 And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed  
 By every scribbler he permits embalm  
 His crambo in the Journal’s corner ! Cloyed  
 With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm 670  
 Be caused by verse like mine : though that’s no  
 cause  
 For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV.

“ Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon ?  
 First let him fear *me* ! Change smooth speech to  
 rough !  
 I’ll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon  
 Who is the foe to dread : insist enough  
 On my own merits till, as clear as noon,  
 He sees I am no man to take rebuff  
 As patiently as scribblers may and must ! 679  
 Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust ! ”

## LXXXVI.

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings  
 Its challenge in the critic's face. Alack !  
 Our bard mistakes his man ! The gauntlet rings  
 On brazen visor proof against attack.  
 Prompt from his editorial throne up springs  
 The insulted magnate, and his mace falls, thwack,  
 On Paul's devoted brainpan, — quite away  
 From common courtesies of fencing-play !

## LXXXVII.

“ Sir, will you have the truth ? This piece of yours  
 Is simply execrable past belief. 690  
 I shrank from saying so ; but, since naught cures  
 Conceit but truth, truth 's at your service ! Brief,  
 Just so long as ‘ The Mercury ’ endures,  
 So long are you excluded by its Chief  
 From corner, nay, from cranny ! Play the cock  
 O' the roost, henceforth, at Croisic ! ” wrote La Roque.

## LXXXVIII.

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red  
 Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme  
 Was merely foolish, faulty in the head  
 Not heart of him : conceit 's a venial crime. 700  
 “ Oh by no means malicious ! ” cousins said :  
 Fussily feeble, — harmless all the time,  
 Piddling at so-called satire — well-advised,  
 He held in most awe whom he satirized.

## LXXXIX.

Accordingly his kith and kin — removed  
 From emulation of the poet's gift  
 By power and will — these rather liked, nay, loved  
 The man who gave his family a lift

Out of the Croisic level ; “ disapproved  
 Satire so trenchant.” Thus cur poet sniffed 710  
 Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock  
 “ The Mercury’s ” box of ointment was La Roque.

XC.

But when Paul’s visage grew from red to white,  
 And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell  
 Of who was to be kicked, — “ And serve him right ” —  
 A gay voice interposed — “ did kicking well  
 Answer the purpose ! Only — if I might  
 Suggest as much — a far more potent spell  
 Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,  
 Women are ready at resource, you know ! 720

XCI.

“ Talent should minister to genius ! Good :  
 The proper and superior smile returns.  
 Hear me with patience ! Have you understood  
 The only method whereby genius earns  
 Fit guerdon nowadays ? In knightly mood  
 You entered lists with visor up ; one learns  
 Too late that, had you mounted Roland’s crest,  
 ‘ Room ! ’ they had roared — La Roque with all the rest !

XCII.

“ Why did you first of all transmit your piece  
 To those same priggish Forty unprepared 730  
 Whether to rank you with the swans or geese  
 By friendly intervention ? If they dared  
 Cor’nt you a cackler, — wonders never cease !  
 I think it still more wondrous that you bared  
 Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise  
 Were gained by simple fighting nowadays \



## XCIII.

“ Your next step showed a touch of the true means  
 Whereby desert is crowned : not force but wile  
 Came to the rescue. ‘ Get behind the scenes ! ’ 739  
 Your friend advised : he writes, sets forth your style  
 And title, to such purpose intervenes  
 That you get velvet-compliment three-pile ;  
 And, though ‘ The Mercury ’ said ‘ nay,’ nor stock  
 Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

## XCIV.

“ Why must you needs revert to the high hand,  
 Imperative procedure — what you call  
 ‘ Taking on merit your exclusive stand ’ ?  
*Stand*, with a vengeance ! Soon you went to wall,  
 You and your merit ! Only fools command  
 When folk are free to disobey them, Paul ! 750  
 You’ve learnt your lesson, found out what’s o’clock,  
 By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

## XCV.

“ Now let me counsel ! Lay this piece on shelf  
 — Masterpiece though it be ! From out your desk  
 Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf  
 Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque  
 Presiding o’er the Navy ! I myself  
 Hand-write what’s legible yet picturesque ;  
 I’ll copy fair and femininely frock  
 Your poem masculine that courts La Roque ! 760

## XCVI.

“ Deidamia he — Achilles thou !  
 Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt !  
 My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow  
 In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped

I see the walls which stand so stoutly now !  
 I see the toils about the game entrapped  
 By honest cunning ! Chains of lady's-smock,  
 Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque !”

xcvii.

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch 769  
 That laughed above Paul's shoulder as it heaved  
 With the indignant heart ? — bade steal a march  
 And not continue charging ? Who conceived  
 This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch  
 On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,  
 From arm-chair moodiness to escriptoire  
 Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir ?

xcviii.

Who but Paul's sister ! named of course like him  
 “ Desforges ” ; but, mark you, in those days a queer  
 Custom obtained, — who knows whence grew the  
 whim ? —  
 That people could not read their title clear 780  
 To reverence till their own true names, made dim  
 By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,  
 Replaced by brand-new bright ones : Arouet,  
 For instance, grew Voltaire ; Desforges — Malcraï.

xcix.

“ Demoiselle Malcraï de la Vigne ” — because  
 The family possessed at Brederac  
 A vineyard, — few grapes, many hips-and-haws, —  
 Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back  
 Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,  
 So did her sprightly nature nowise lack 790  
 Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,  
 In “ Malcraï de la Vigne ” — more short, “ Malcraï.”

## C.

Out from Paul's *escritoire* behold escape  
 The hoarded treasure ! verse falls thick and fast,  
 Sonnets and songs of every size and shape.  
 The lady ponders on her prize ; at last  
 Selects one which — Oh angel and yet ape ! —  
 Her malice thinks is probably surpassed  
 In badness by no fellow of the flock,  
 Copies it fair, and " Now for my La Roque ! " 800

## CI.

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,  
 The soft petitionary letter. " Grant  
 A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt  
 She soar her little circuit, habitant  
 Of an old manor ; buried in which crypt,  
 How can the youthful *châtelaine* but pant  
 For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*  
 Appointed ' Mercury's ' Editor, La Roque ? " "

## CII.

'T was an epistle that might move the Turk !  
 More certainly it moved our middle-aged 810  
 Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,  
 Raked the old ashes up and disengaged  
 The sparks of gallantry which always lurk  
 Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged  
 In no degree by compliments on style ;  
 Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile ?

## CIII.

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place  
 Of honor in the gratified Gazette,  
 With due acknowledgment of power and grace ;  
 Prognostication, too, that higher yet 820

The Breton Muse will soar : fresh youth, high race,  
 Beauty and wealth have amicably met  
 That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair  
 Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

civ.

“ There ! ” cried the lively lady. “ Who was right —  
 You in the dumps, or I the merry maid  
 Who know a trick or two can baffle spite  
 Tenfold the force of this old fool’s ? Afraid  
 Of Editor La Roque ? But come ! next flight 829  
 Shall outsoar — Deshoulières alone ? My blade,  
 Sappho herself shall you confess outstript !  
 Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript ! ”

cv.

And so, once well a-foot, advanced the game :  
 More and more verses, corresponding gush  
 On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim  
 Rose to the pitch of uproar. “ Sappho ? Tush !  
 Sure ‘ Malcrais on her Parrot ’ puts to shame  
 Deshoulières’ pastoral, clay not worth a rush  
 Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock,  
 Unearthed in Brittany, — nay, ask La Roque ! ” 840

cvi.

Such was the Paris tribute. “ Yes,” you sneer,  
 “ Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage  
 Resist contagious folly, never fear ! ”  
 Do they ? Permit me to detach one page  
 From the huge Album which from far and near  
 Poetic praises blackened in a rage  
 Of rapture ! and that page shall be — who stares  
 Confounded now, I ask you ? — just Voltaire’s \

## CVII.

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed  
 To death Imposture through the armor-joints ! 850  
 How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed  
 Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out ? Fate appoints  
 That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed  
 Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,  
 Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,  
 And dismalest of tumbles proved — Voltaire's !

## CVIII.

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith  
 " Henri " in verse and " Charles " in prose besent  
 To do her suit and service ! Here 's the pith  
 Of half a dozen stanzas — stones which went 860  
 To build that simulated monolith —  
 Sham love in due degree with homage blent  
 As sham — which in the vast of volumes scares  
 The traveller still : " That stucco-heap — Voltaire's ? "

## CIX.

" Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown  
 The wilds to startle Paris that 's one ear !  
 Thou who such strange capacity hast shown  
 For joining all that 's grand with all that 's dear,  
 Knowledge with power to please — Deshoulières grown  
 Learned as Dacier in thy person ! mere 870  
 Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine  
 I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine !

## CX.

" Charles was my taskwork only ; Henri trod  
 My hero erst ; and now, my heroine — she  
 Shall be thyself ! True — is it true, great God ?  
 Certainly love henceforward must not be !

Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail — how odd ! —  
 Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me !  
 There 's no replacing love with these, alas !  
 Yet all I can I do to prove no ass. 880

CXI.

“ I labor to amuse my freedom ; but  
 Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,  
 And — borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut ! —  
 Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,  
 Soon should I see myself in prison shut  
 With all imaginable pleasure.” Reach  
 The washhand-basin for admirers ! There 's  
 A stomach-moving tribute — and Voltaire 's !

CXII.

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,  
 Adulatory flourish, not worth frown ! 890  
 What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux ?  
 These in their Dictionary have her down  
 Under the heading “ Author ” : “ Malcraix, too,  
 Is ‘ Author ’ of such verse that claims renown.”  
 While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why proceed ?  
 Enough of this — something too much, indeed !

CXIII.

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left  
 Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds  
 Of figurative passion ; hilt and heft,  
 Plunged his huge downright love through what  
 surrounds 900  
 The literary female bosom ; reft  
 Away its veil of coy reserve with “ Zounds !  
 I love thee, Breton Beauty ! All 's no use !  
 Body and soul I love, — the big word 's loose !”

## CXIV.

*He's greatest now and to de-struct-i-on*  
*Nearest.* Attend the solemn word I quote,  
 O Paul! *There's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*  
 Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!  
*Greatness a period bath, no sta-ti-on!*  
 Better and truer verse none ever wrote 910  
 (Despite the antique outstretched *a-i-on*)  
 Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

## CXV.

Flat on his face, La Roque, and, — pressed to heart  
 His dexter hand, — Voltaire with bended knee!  
 Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart  
 Leaned over him his sister. “Well!” smirks he,  
 And “Well?” she answers, smiling — woman's art  
 To let a man's own mouth, not hers, decree  
 What shall be next move which decides the game:  
 Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame. 920

## CXVI.

“Well!” this time forth affirmatively comes  
 With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through teeth  
 Close clenched o'er satisfaction, as the gums  
 Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath  
 Palate by lubricating tongue: “Well! crumbs  
 Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death  
 Likely from famine at Fame's feast! 't is clear  
 I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

## CXVII.

“La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise  
 Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop! 930  
 I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men's eyes  
 My proper manly garb and mount a-top

The pedestal that waits me, take the prize  
 Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop  
 To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,  
 Then, following, licked his heels : exactly so !

CXVIII.

“ I like the prospect — their astonishment,  
 Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,  
 Mixed motives ; how I see the brows quick bent !  
 ‘ What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about 940  
 This change of estimation ? Phœbus sent  
 His shafts as from Diana ? ’ Critic pout  
 Turns courtier smile : ‘ Lo, him we took for her !  
 Pleasant mistake ! You bear no malice, sir ? ’

CXIX.

“ Eh, my Diana ? ” But Diana kept  
 Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp  
 Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept  
 Paul’s very thoughts ere they had time to warp  
 From earnest into sport the words they leapt 949  
 To life with — changed as when maltreated harp  
 Renders in tinkle what some player-prig  
 Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX.

“ What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,  
 My lessons end in loss ? ” at length fall slow  
 The pitying syllables, her lips allay  
 The satire of by keeping in full flow,  
 Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play :  
 “ Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know  
 And altogether estimate applause  
 As just so many asinine hee-haws ?



## CXXI.

“ I thought to show you ” . . . “ Show me, ” Paul  
in-broke,

“ My poetry is rubbish, and the world  
That rings with my renown a sorry joke !

What fairer test of worth than that, form furl'd,  
I entered the arena ? Yet you croak

Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurl'd  
The dart and struck the Python ! What, he crawls  
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's ?

## CXXII.

“ Nay, 't is no laughing matter though absurd

If there's an end of honesty on earth ! 970

La Roque sends letters, lying every word !

Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth  
To the remotest age ! Rousseau's the third

Who, driven to despair amid such dearth  
Of people that want praising, finds no one  
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton !

## CXXIII.

“ Somebody says — if a man writes at all

It is to show the writer's kith and kin

He was unjustly thought a natural ;

And truly, sister, I have yet to win 980  
Your favorable word, it seems, for Paul

Whose poetry you count not worth a pin  
Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,

Rousseaus and suchlike : let them quack, who cares ? ”

## CXXIV.

“ — To Paris with you, Paul ! Not one word's waste  
Further : my scrupulosity was vain !

Go triumph! Be my foolish fears effaced  
 From memory's record! Go, to come again  
 With glory crowned, — by sister re-embraced,  
 Cured of that strange delusion of her brain 990  
 Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats  
 On male limbs mostly when in petticoats!"

CXXV.

So laughed her last word, with the little touch  
 Of malice proper to the outraged pride  
 Of any artist in a work too much  
 Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried  
 The opposite procedure! Cast your crutch  
 Away, no longer crippled, nor divide  
 The credit of your march to the World's Fair 999  
 With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there!"

CXXVI.

Crippled, forsooth! what courser sprightlier pranced  
 Paris-ward than did Paul? Nay, dreams lent wings:  
 He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.  
 Dreams? wide-awake realities: no things  
 Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced  
 The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings  
 Crowned by Apollo — not to say with queens  
 Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII.

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before  
 The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc 1010  
 Announces there's a giant at the door.  
 "Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."  
 "Lackey! Malcrais, — mind, no word less nor  
 more! —  
 Desires his presence. I've unearthed the brock:

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Now, to transfix him!" There stands Paul erect,  
Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII.

A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!  
Can it be that my heart attains at last  
Its longing? that you stand, the very same 1019  
As in my visions? . . . Ha! hey, how?" aghast  
Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy's to blame!  
You merely are the messenger! Too fast  
My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh!  
Well, sir, the lady's substitute is — who?"

CXXIX.

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands!  
Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,  
Though nor Malerai nor any mistress stands  
To move your ardor! So, you don't divine  
Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's  
Walls loyered and breasted? Just be whereof no  
Doubt  
Had ever here or there been heard! — eh?  
That always Malerai — never de Malerai!"

CXXX.

And here the two poets were confounding smirk,  
As he would wit what should be said to the  
To wit the words of the heart or quirk  
The key to the riddle, a laugh — Bah!  
No — that is not a wit — a wit with smirk  
The confusion — the confusion — the  
The confusion — the confusion — the  
The confusion — the confusion — the  
The confusion — the confusion — the

CXXXI.

“ I ’m nobody — a wren-like journalist ;  
 You ’ve flown at higher game and winged your bird,  
 The golden eagle ! That ’s the grand acquist !  
 Voltaire’s sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred  
 Prettily round your feet ; but if she missed  
 Priority of stroking, soon were stirred  
 The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire ! away,  
 Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais ! ”

CXXXII.

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,  
 The two begin their journey. Need I say, 1050  
 La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,  
 Had a long-standing little debt to pay,  
 And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare  
 Occasion for its due discharge ? So, gay  
 And grenadier-like, marching to assault,  
 They reach the enemy’s abode, there halt.

CXXXIII.

“ I ’ll be announcer ! ” quoth La Roque : “ I know,  
 Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,  
 How to procure an audience ! He ’s not slow  
 To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire ! Discard 1060  
 The petticoats too soon, — you ’ll never show  
 Your *baut-de-chausses* and all they ’ve made or marred  
 In your true person. Here ’s his servant. Pray,  
 Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais ? ”

CXXXIV.

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,  
 The man of self-respect, — more great man he !  
 And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,  
 And decorated to the fit degree

His person ; 't was enough to bear the stress  
 Of battle in the field, without, when free 1070  
 From outside foes, inviting friends' attack  
 By — sword in hand ? No, — ill-made coat on back !

## CXXXV.

And, since the announcement of his visitor  
 Surprised him at his toilet, — never glass  
 Had such solicitation ! “ Black, now — or  
 Brown be the killing wig to wear ? Alas,  
 Where 's the rouge gone, this cheek were better for  
 A tender touch of ? Melted to a mass,  
 All my pomatum ! There 's at all events  
 A devil — for he 's got among my scents ! ” 1080

## CXXXVI.

So, “barbered ten times o'er,” as Antony  
 Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last  
 Voltaire proceed to the fair presence : high  
 In color, proud in port, as if a blast  
 Of trumpet bade the world “ Take note ! draws nigh  
 To Beauty, Power ! Behold the Iconoclast,  
 The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod  
 Of iron for imposture ! Ah my God ! ”

## CXXXVII.

For there stands smirking Paul, and — what lights  
 fierce  
 The situation as with sulphur flash — 1090  
 There grinning stands La Roque ! No carte-and-tierce  
 Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash  
 From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce  
 That armor against which so idly clash  
 The swords of priests and pedants ! Victors there,  
 Two smirk and grin who have befooled — Voltaire !

CXXXVIII.

A moment's horror ; then quick turn-about  
 On high-heeled shoe, — flurry of ruffles, flounce  
 Of wig-ties and of coat-tails, — and so out 1099  
 Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes — bounce —  
 Voltaire in tragic exit ! vows, no doubt,  
 Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce  
 Either, in point of fact ? His anger's flash  
 Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX.

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh  
 To heart's content, — the joke defunct at once,  
 Dead in the birth, you see, — its epitaph  
 Was sober earnest. “ Well, sir, for the nonce,  
 You've gained the laurel ; never hope to graff  
 A second sprig of triumph there ! Ensconce 1110  
 Yourself again at Croisic : let it be  
 Enough you mastered both Voltaire and — me !

CXL.

“ Don't linger here in Paris to parade  
 Your victory, and have the very boys  
 Point at you ! ‘ There's the little mouse which made  
 Believe those two big lions that its noise,  
 Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed  
 Intelligence that — portent which destroys  
 All courage in the lion's heart, with horn  
 That's fable — there lay couched the unicorn !’ 1120

CXLI.

“ Beware us, now we've found who fooled us !  
 Quick  
 To cover ! ‘ In proportion to men's fright,

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Expect their fright's revenge !' quoth politic  
 Old Macchiavelli. As for me, — all's right :  
 I'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick  
 The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite !  
 So, keep your counsel, I advise ! Adieu !  
 Good journey ! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was — you !'

CXLII.

“ — Yes, I'm Malcrais, and somebody beside, 1129  
 You snickering monkey ! ” thus winds up the tale  
 Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed  
 Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale  
 Mortified poet. “ Let their worst be tried,  
 I'm their match henceforth — very man and  
 male !  
 Don't talk to me of knocking-under ! man  
 And male must end what petticoats began !

CXLIII.

“ How woman-like it is to apprehend  
 The world will eat its words ! why, words trans-  
 fixed  
 To stone, they stare at you in print, — at end, 1139  
 Each writer's style and title ! Choose betwixt  
 Fool and knave for his name, who should intend  
 To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed  
 With prospect of advantage ! What is writ  
 Is writ : they've praised me, there's an end of it.

CXLIV.

‘ No, Dear, allow me ! I shall print these same  
 Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.  
 Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame  
 What they — praised simply ? — placed on pedes-  
 tals,

Each piece a statue in the House of Fame !

Fast will they stand there, though their presence  
 galls 1150  
 The envious crew : such show their teeth, perhaps,  
 And snarl, but never bite ! I know the chaps !”

CXLV.

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded ! Pace  
 Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,  
 Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race  
 Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats  
 Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,  
 The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,  
 One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,  
 That needle under, stream with weedy rags ! 1160

CXLVI.

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,  
 Rude heritage but recognized domain,  
 Do as two here are doing : make hearth crack  
 With logs until thy chimney roar again  
 Jolly with fire-glow ! Let its angle lack  
 No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain  
 To do a sister's office and laugh smooth  
 Thy corrugated brow — that scowls forsooth !

CXLVII.

Wherefore ? Who does not know how these La  
 Roques,  
 Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame, 1170  
 Prove black white, white black, play at paradox  
 And, when they seem to lose it, win the game ?  
 Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,  
 His fellow in rascality, call “ fame !”



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Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it, — quack, quack,  
quack!

Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII.

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!

A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care  
As much for what to-day they clap or hiss

As for the fashion of the wigs they wear, 1180  
Then wonder at. 'There's fame which, bale or  
bliss, —

Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire  
Or not-so-great La Roque, — is taken back  
By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX.

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!

No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the maid,  
Thenceforth forever! One or two, I see,

Stuck by their poet: who the longest stayed  
Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he

Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid 1190  
A rhyming tribute "After death, survive —  
He hoped he should; and died while yet alive!"

CL.

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held

His peace and died in silent good old age.  
Him it was, curiosity impelled

To seek if there were extant still some page  
Of his great predecessor, rat who belled

The cat once, and would never deign engage  
*In after-combat* with mere mice, — saved from  
*More sonnetteering*, — René Gentilhomme. 1200

CLI.

Paul's story furnished forth that famous play  
 Of Piron's "Métromanie": there you'll find  
 He's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais  
 Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!  
 As for Voltaire, he's Damis. Good and gay  
 The plot and dialogue, and all's designed  
 To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the laugh  
 Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII.

But truth, truth, that's the gold! and all the good  
 I find in fancy is, it serves to set 1210  
 Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude  
 And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret  
 Of artistry beyond this point pursued  
 Brings out another sort of burnish: yet  
 Always the ingot has its very own  
 Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII.

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt  
 Of fitful flame, — twin births of our gray brand  
 That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,  
 As sparkles want but fuel to expand 1220  
 Into a conflagration no mere squirt  
 Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic strand,  
 Had Fortune pleased posterity to chouse,  
 Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV.

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?  
 But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!  
 How often frustrate they of fame's award  
 Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew

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Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled and  
marred

And forced to put about the First-rate! True, 1230  
Such tacks but for a time: still — small-craft ride  
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the tide!

CLV.

Dear, shall I tell you? There's a simple test  
Would serve, when people take on them to weigh  
The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,  
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay  
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)  
"What quality preponderating may  
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife  
By asking "Which one led a happy life?" 1240

CLVI.

If one did, over his antagonist  
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or  
wailed  
Or simply had the dumps, — dispute who list, —  
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,  
Mastered by his own means of might, — acquist  
Of necessary sorrows, — he prevailed,  
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct  
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII.

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"  
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sigh —  
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel 1251  
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,

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One dance of rogues and idiots ! Not, to deal  
More with things lovely ? What provoked the spite  
Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need  
Of other nutriment than strife and greed !

CLVIII.

Who knows most, doubts most ; entertaining hope,  
Means recognizing fear ; the keener sense  
Of all comprised within our actual scope 1259  
Récoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.  
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope  
Henceforward among groundlings ? That 's offence  
Just as indubitably : stars abound  
O'erhead, but then — what flowers make glad the  
ground !

CLIX.

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force :  
What then ? since Swiftness gives the charioteer  
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse  
Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the  
steer  
Sluggish and safe ! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,  
Despair : but ever mid the whirling fear, 1270  
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face  
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race !

CLX.

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,  
And save my breath for better purpose. White  
From gray our log has burned to : just one blink  
That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite

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The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink  
Punish who sealed so deep into the night  
Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long, —  
Here pleads a live pretender : right your wrong ! 1280

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I.

What a pretty tale you told me  
Once upon a time  
— Said you found it somewhere (scold me !)  
Was it prose or was it rhyme,  
Greek or Latin ? Greek, you said,  
While your shoulder propped my head.

II.

Anyhow there's no forgetting  
This much if no more,  
That a poet (pray, no petting !)  
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore, 10  
Went where suchlike used to go,  
Singing for a prize, you know.

III.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely  
Sing but play the lyre ;  
Playing was important clearly  
Quite as singing : I desire,  
Sir, you keep the fact in mind  
For a purpose that 's behind.

IV.

There stood he, while deep attention  
Held the judges round, 20

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THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC. 279

— Judges able, I should mention,  
To detect the slightest sound  
Sung or played amiss : such ears  
Had old judges, it appears !

v.

None the less he sang out boldly,  
Played in time and tune,  
Till the judges, weighing coldly  
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,  
Sure to smile " In vain one tries  
Picking faults out : take the prize ! " 30

vi.

When, a mischief! Were they seven  
Strings the lyre possessed ?  
Oh, and afterwards eleven,  
Thank you! Well, sir, — who had guessed  
Such ill luck in store ? — it happed  
One of those same seven strings snapped.

vii.

All was lost, then ! No! a cricket  
(What " cicada " ? Pooh !)  
— Some mad thing that left its thicket  
For mere love of music — flew 40  
With its little heart on fire,  
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

viii.

So that when (ah joy ! ) our singer  
For his truant string

With my lyre at lowest, highest,  
 Right alike, — one string that made  
 ‘ Love ’ sound soft was snapt in twain,  
 Never to be heard again, —

## XVII.

“ Had not a kind cricket fluttered,  
 Perched upon the place  
 Vacant left, and duly uttered  
 ‘ Love, Love, Love,’ whene’er the bass 100  
 Asked the treble to atone  
 For its somewhat sombre drone.”

## XVIII.

But you don’t know music ! Wherefore  
 Keep on casting pearls  
 To a — poet ? All I care for  
 Is — to tell him that a girl’s  
 “ Love ” comes aptly in when gruff  
 Grows his singing. (There, enough !)

## NOTES.

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### RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY.

**Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. I.** In this poem the poet tells the story to his friend, Miss Thackeray, whom he is supposed to have met on the beach at Saint-Rambert in Normandy. The conversation opens and continues for some time in a quizzical, bantering vein, which constantly awakens curiosity to be gratified later. Miss Thackeray having proposed the name "White Cotton Night-Cap Country," as appropriate to the drowsiness of the neighborhood, and intending to write a story with that title, the poet questions as to what especial kind of a night-cap she has in mind. She retorts by asking what other kind of night-cap could there be than night-caps pure and simple. Then the poet enlarges upon the fact that the ignorant might suppose a fiddle just a fiddle, but is n't there going on at that moment at Kensington a fiddle show in which there are being exhibited three hundred varieties, then why might there not be quite as remarkable a night-cap show? From this he goes on to enumerate the different kinds of night-caps he can think of, until he gets, by a series of associations, to a hangman and the French Revolution and a red cotton night-cap; then wonders whether there is any bit of life in this quiet neighborhood that could be symbolized by such a title. So gradually he leads up to the subject of the poem; at last, pointing out a church which had received as a gift two gold crowns for the Virgin and



babe. The Virgin's crown was supplied by the Paris goldsmith Miranda, and here or nowhere he will establish a night-cap gleam of visionary red in this White Night-Cap Country. Then he tells her of the prosperity of Miranda, who is his father's heir, and gives an account of his dwelling, Clairvaux, as they walk toward it to inspect it. Letting out the secret he has kept so far, that Miranda is dead, he humorously suggests various possibilities as giving rise to his statement that this is the veritable red night-cap spot in the neighborhood. His friend follows with others, all of which he declares far from the mark, till she says, "Not of the world your heroine?" This is the cue for him to describe the appearance of the heroine he had seen the day before, and to indulge in more suppositions as to the life of Miranda and his wife, which still do not reveal the "red." At this point the tantalizing poet doles out his "red" fact that Léonce Miranda met a tragic death.

II. Before going on to tell the whole story, the poet again digresses to introduce the simile of a ruin, and propound the question as to whether it should be left for time to demolish it or whether one should repair it, deciding that as soon as a ruin reaches the rubbish stage it should quickly be repaired, — and here was Miranda's weakness; he tried to walk straight through life with a ravage of opinions in his path. Now comes the story.

Miranda, of mixed Castilian and French blood, was grounded in his youth in a trusting sort of faith in the Church, which side of his nature, along with all the conventional ideas attendant upon it, Browning constantly symbolizes throughout the poem as "towers." The young man, however, discovers the possibilities in a life of pleasure, and this is symbolized as "turf." He is living his life of pleasure in a discreet and economical sort of way, when, one night at "The Varieties," he sees *the woman* with whom he falls in love, and loves with *constancy* for twenty years. She tells first a story of


herself which is not true, and afterwards is obliged to confess the truth that she is a tailor's run-away wife, and is living with a man who leaves her, when he discovers Miranda's visits, with a lot of tradesmen's bills which Miranda pays. Nothing, however, can make Miranda's love waver, and circumstances aid him to carry out his purposes. His father and brother die opportunely; he falls heir to all his father's wealth. Clara's husband, now become a fashionable tailor, turns up and desires to get rid of her legally, so that she cannot make any claim upon his property, and the law decrees them separation. Finally, his mother agrees to countenance somewhat their living together. So they retire to Clairvaux, as a legal marriage is impossible. The question here obtrudes itself upon the poet as to whether turf so protected by tents is not more stable than the far towers. Miranda converts his home into a little artistic Paris, where they live in Norman solitude, few people caring to be friendly with them.

III. His extravagances, however, cause remonstrances from his mother, which rouse his misgivings as to his way of living, and on leaving his mother in a feverish state of mind he plunges into the Seine. He is rescued, but has a dangerous illness through which Clara nurses him. Upon his recovery he is called suddenly to Paris to find his mother dead. His cousins, seeing a chance here to turn his fortune in their direction, make him believe that it is his manner of life which has killed his mother. These representations have the desired effect upon him. He makes arrangements to let them have his business and become his heirs, and decides to give up Clara; but just before completing arrangements he reads over her love-letters, and in a fit of remorse burns them and at the same time his own hands, with the idea that thus he may be purified. The cousins take things into their own hands, tell Clara he has given her up forever and that he has gone to Portugal. But as soon as he recovers from the illness following upon the burning of his

hands, he goes straight to Clara. The result is, he withdraws all the arrangements he was about to conclude for the benefit of the cousins, but sells them his business at a fair price, and again retires with Clara forever to Clairvaux. Since he feels the truth of his life with Clara, or the "turf" side of his existence, and the truth of the rules of the Church or "tower" side, he tries now to make them harmonize. The poet wishes some angel might have directed him to his friend Milsand for advice ; but no angel did. So he goes to the Church ; and the Church, after wrestling with him somewhat in regard to his way of life, finally concludes to wink at it in consideration of the "gifts" it will receive from him. Two years pass, in which he is most generous both to the Church and the poor, while he busies himself learning to do many things without his hands.

IV. At the end of these two years, one spring day, Miranda climbs the stairs to the Belvedere on his house, and as he gazes over the country and sees his church, La Ravissante, he falls to meditating, and experiences an exalted mood of faith, when, with the idea of wiping out all the evils of the past, giving a new start to faith in the world, and putting his Clara on a reputable footing, he suddenly determines to fly through the air to the Virgin lady of his faith, implicitly trusting her power to suspend the laws of gravitation and bear him to her. Such are the experiences which lead up to Miranda's tragic death. He was, of course, considered insane ; but the poet counts him sane for having thus settled his wavering between two beliefs. On the strength of his supposed insanity, the cousins again try to secure Miranda's fortune, but Clara informs them he has left all to the Church, she only having a life interest ; attempts to break the will fail, and the cousins are finally discomfited.

In summing up the two characters, the poet considers Miranda might have attained a better conception of life *than he did*, and is therefore more of a failure than Clara, *who lived completely her nature as far as it went*. She



was not an aspiring soul, however, and incapable of great love, or she would have helped Miranda to find the truth, instead of accommodating herself to all his moods and basking in his kindness.

The story told in this poem is a drama of real life which took place partly in Paris, partly in Normandy. The only changes are in the names of the places and the people. As originally written, the true names were given; but Browning's friend, Lord Coleridge, advised him to change them, because he feared a case of libel might be brought against the poet. The particulars came to his notice while he was spending a part of the summer in Normandy in 1872. He has, of course, used the poet's prerogative in the developing of character and the interpretation of motives, though the conflict in the mind of the hero between his love and ultramontane Christianity is a part of the true history upon which the poem is based. The true names in the tragedy were later given to Mrs. Orr by Browning, and are as follows:—

I. II. *The Firm-Miranda*: Mellerio Brothers.

41. *Saint-Rambert*: Saint-Aubin.

42. *Foyeux, Joyous-Gard*: Lion, Lionesse.

82. *Vire*: Caen.

362. *Saint-Rambertese*: Saint-Aubinese.

422. *Londres*: Douvres.

426. *London*: Dover.

427. *La Roche*: Courcelle.

428. *Monlieu*: Bernières.

430. *Villeneuve*: Langrune. — *Pons*: Luc.

432. *La Ravissante*: La Délivrande.

495. *Raimbaux*: Bayeux.

499. *Morillon*: Hugonin.

506. *Mirecourt*: Bonnechose.

513. *Miranda*: Mellerio.

522. *New-York*: Madrid.

614. *Clairvaux*: Tailleville.

638. *Gonthier*: Bény.

643. *Rousseau*: Voltaire.

645. *Léonce*: Antoine.
785. *Of "Firm-Miranda, London and New-York"* :  
 "Mellerio Brothers ;" Meller, people say.
- II. 158. *Rare Vissante*: Dell Yvrande.
160. *Aldabert*: Regnobert.
164. *Eldobert*: Ragnobert.
174. *Mailleville*: Beaudoin.
184. *Chaumont*: Quelen.
186. *Vertgalant*: Talleyrand.
483. *Clara de Millefleurs*: Anna de Beaupré.
489. *Coliseum Street*: Miromesnil Street.
629. *Steiner*: Mayer.
630. *Commercy*: Larocy. — *Sierck*: Metz.
637. *Muhlhausen*: Debacker.
661. *Carlino Centofanti*: Miranda di Mongino.
800. *Portugal*: Italy.
1017. *Vaillant*: Mériel.
- III. 87. *Thirty-three*: Twenty-five.
117. *Beaumont*: Pasquier.
344. *Sceaux*: Garges.
889. *Luc de la Maison Rouge*: Jean de la Becquetière
890. *Claise*: Vire.
891. *Maude*: Anne.
913. *Dionysius*: Eliezer.
916. *Scolastica*: Elizabeth.
- IV. 2. *Twentieth*: Thirteenth.
368. *Fricquot*: Picot.
- I. 9. *Place Vendôme*: a square in Paris.
10. *Golconda*: a fortress in Hindostan, proverbially famous for diamond mines popularly thought to be in the vicinity, but the diamonds are merely cut and polished there.
20. *Un-Murrayed*: not mentioned in Murray's famous guide-book. There are a number of small watering-places on the coast of Normandy which may be found described in Henry Blackburn's "Normandy Picturesque." Katherine S. Macquoid's "Through Normandy" also mentions some of these smaller places.

36. *Vàrech*: same as kelp, a kind of sea-weed.  
42. *Joyous-Gard*: same as Lionesse, the estate given by King Arthur to Lancelot as a reward for defending Guinevere.

72. *Corso*: the principal street in Rome.

134. *The Emperor*: Napoleon III.

257. *Guarnerius*: Andreas, and his son Giuseppe were early Italian violin-makers. — *Straduaris*: Antonio, was a famous violin-maker of Cremona (1649-1737).

267. *Corelli*: a celebrated violin-player and composer.

268. *Griewing, by minors, like the cushat-dove*: the cushat-dove is the ring-dove or wood-pigeon.

269. *Giga*: or *gigue*, an old Italian dance, derives its name from the giga, or early fiddle. The tempo was lively; and it was frequently used to end a suite. One of Corelli's suites ends with a giga. — *Saraband*: a stately dance in 3-2 or 3-4 time. Corelli also wrote sarabands.

282. *Pope*: English poet (1688-1744).

287. *Voltaire*: the assumed name of François Marie Arouet, the French poet, historian, and philosopher, and most celebrated writer of the last century. He was in the habit of wearing a velvet cap (1694-1778). — *Hogarth*: William (1697-1764), the celebrated English artist who mercilessly satirized society in his drawings. He is represented with a cap on in his portraits.

291. *Cowper*: English poet (1731-1800), who is also represented in portraits with a cap.

308. *Louis*: XVI. of France, deposed by the Revolution of 1792 and beheaded.

313. *Phrygian symbol*: Phrygian cap is a figurative expression for the cap of freedom. The French Revolutionists called their cap the *bonnet-rouge*. It is said to have been shaped like the caps the ancient Phrygians wore.

324. *The Corsican lieutenant*: Napoleon I.

327. *Canaille*: from the Italian *Canaglia*; literally, dogs, a term of scorn for the populace.

337. *Quod semel, semper, et ubique*: what was once and is always and everywhere.

356. *Rahab-thread*: Joshua ii. 18.

364. *Octroi*: a tax levied at the gates of Continental cities on articles of food, etc.

406. *Liebig*: Justus, Baron von, a distinguished German chemist (born 1803).

425. *The Conqueror's country*: Normandy, the land of William the Conqueror.

432. *Ravissante*: Browning's name for the famous pilgrimage Church of Notre Dame de la Délivrande at Douvres. It was first built in the twelfth century, but nothing of the old building is left except some of the work in the north and west arcades. There is an interesting legend about the image of Notre Dame in the chapel, which tells how it was buried for two hundred years until the beginning of the eleventh century, and was then discovered through the strange actions of a ram. This ram used to leave its flock, and run to a place near the pasture, where it dug with its feet and horns, and when tired lay down in the hole. As this ram never ate and was the fattest of the flock, the reigning count supposed there must be something miraculous connected with it; so, accompanied by a holy hermit, the nobility and great crowds of people gathered at the spot, and dug in the trench made by the ram, and discovered an image of the Virgin. It was set up in the church with great pomp and ceremony, but was carried back to the old spot by an angel, by which sign the count knew he was to build a chapel for it there. Notre-Dame de la Délivrande was famous for its miraculous cures, and is still a favorite shrine for pilgrims.

438. *Lourdes and La Salette*: famous places of pilgrimage in France.

464. *Alessandro Sforza*: a duke of Milan in 1450.

492. *Martinique*: the most northerly of the Caribbee Islands, in the West Indies, belonging to France, which evidently has a church named after the one in Douvres.

506. *Cardinal Mirecourt*: Bonnechose, French Archbishop, Cardinal, and Senator, supporter of the temporal

power of the Popes, opposed to Italian unity and freedom of expression.

595. *Abaris*: a priest of Apollo, who rode through the air invisible, on a golden arrow, curing diseases and giving oracles as he went.

595. *With diamond-necklace-dealing*: among Carlyle's essays will be found one which tells of the famous diamond necklace case in Paris.

610. *Lucarnes*: or *lucaynes*, dormer windows.

615. *Abbey-for-the-Males*: Abbaye aux Hommes, a fine old abbey in Caen; built by William the Conqueror. He was buried in the Church of Saint-Étienne; but his tomb, which was marked by a costly monument placed there by his sons Rufus and Henry was destroyed by the Calvinists and his bones scattered among the ruins. In 1642 the bones were collected and re-interred under a simple monument, but at the outbreak of the Revolution this was destroyed, and later the grave was again rifled. A slab with an inscription now marks the spot.

632. *Madrilene*: from Madrid.

714. *Élysées*: refers to the fine Paris street, the Champs Élysées. — *De Boulogne*: refers to the fine Paris park, Bois de Boulogne.

1006. *Cul-de-sac*: literally, bottom of a bag, used of any one hemmed in with no outlet except in front.

II. 67. *Father Secchi*: a celebrated Jesuit astronomer who lived in Rome.

87. *Idalian shape*: pertaining to Venus; after Idalia, an ancient town sacred to Venus.

88. *Victrix*: victress.

172. *An egregious sheep*: see note I. 432.

184. *Archbishop Chaumont*: Quelen, a French prelate, Archbishop of Paris in 1821 (1778-1839).

186. *Vertgalant*: Talleyrand (1754-1838). An accident in early life compelled him to go into the Church, but, being called upon in virtue of his office as Archbishop of Autun to take his seat in the États Généraux, scope was given him for the development of his talents as a



statesman, and his name became illustrious through all Europe for thirty-five years.

204. *Rabelais*: a celebrated French wit and satirist (1483-1553).

215. *Acromia*: the outer extremities of the shoulder-blades.

231. *Sganarelle*: the name of the hero in Molière's comedy "Le Mariage Forcé."

278. *Caën*: an ancient and interesting city in Normandy.

289. *Inveni ovem [meam] quæ perierat*: I have found my sheep which was lost. St. Luke xv. 6.

596. *Fævonian Breeze*: the western, favorable breeze.

597. *Auster*: south wind and unfavorable.

609. *A chicken threatened with the pip*: pip is a disease of fowls consisting of a secretion of mucus in the mouth and throat.

613. *Haschisch*: made from the tops and tender parts of Indian hemp. It is a strong narcotic.

1090. *L'Ingegno*: the genius.

1099. *Sieur Boileau*: French poet and satirist (1636-1711).

1101. *Louis Quatorze*: Louis XIV., King of France from 1643 to 1715.

1102. *Pierre Corneille*: called "the Great" by his admiring contemporaries, the most brilliant dramatist of the time of Louis XIV. (1606-1684).

III. 38. *Sardanapalus*: a prince of Assyria, celebrated for his luxuriant and extravagant habits. The date of his reign is placed about 836-817 B. C.

491. *Religio Medici*: "Religion of a Doctor;" the title of a book by Sir Thomas Browne.

742. *Rouher*: Eugene, a French politician under Napoleon III.

744. *Ecumenical Assemblage*: a council of the bishops of the whole Church, presided over by the Pope or delegates of the Pope. Browning probably had in mind the great assemblage of 1870, when the infalli-

bility of the Pope was discussed and passed by a large vote.

781. *Milsand*: Joseph, a friend of Browning's, who spent his summers in Saint-Aubin.

875. *Fons et origo*: the fount and origin.

901. *On Christmas morn . . . three Masses*: the first Mass is celebrated at midnight, the second at dawn, and the third on Christmas morning.

904. *Cistercian monk*: this religious order was established in 1098 by Robert, abbot of Molcuse, and was named from the forest of Citeaux, near Dijon, where the first convent was situated.

913. *Capucin*: a monk of the order of Saint Francis.

915. *Benedict*: the founder of the order of Benedictine Monks. He was born in Nursia about 480, and became so great a power that he was able to build twelve monasteries.

916. *Scolastica*: this was the name of Benedict's sister, who established a convent near Monte Cassino.

1000. *Star of Sea*: Stella Maris, one of the names of the Virgin.

1048. *Bach*: a celebrated composer of the classic school of German music. The poet evidently has in mind a fugue, as that would be the best form of music to try with a piano "pedal-keyed."

1069. *April, 'Seventy, — folly's year in France*: this was the year that war was declared by France against Germany because of the proposition to put a Prussian prince upon the Spanish throne. The French were utterly defeated, Napoleon III. taken prisoner, and Paris besieged.

IV. 15. *Ollivier*: Émile, Prime Minister of France, was responsible for the declaration of war against Prussia in 1870, and at the first news of the Prussian invasion his ministry fell. — *Roon*: Von, a Prussian general at this time, who rendered important services in the reorganization of the army (1803-1879).

16. *Bismarck*: Prime Minister of Germany at the time of the Franco-Prussian war.

179. *Here came Louis Onze*: Louis XI., King of France, is said to have gone on a pilgrimage to La Délivrande on the fourteenth of August, 1493.

183. *I do not read it in Commines*: the more correct way of spelling it is "Comines." He is called "the father of Modern History." His Memoirs cover the reigns of Louis XI. and Charles VIII. He does not speak of this pilgrimage of Louis XI.

184. *Marie-Antoinette*: wife of Louis XVI. of France. No record of her pilgrimage to La Délivrande is given in the usual biographies of her.

197. *Count of Chambord*: head of the older branch of the royal house of Bourbon, and properly heir to Louis XVIII. There was great rejoicing among the Royalists at his birth, and he was called a "child of miracle." In spite of all this he was never for some reason brought forward as a candidate to the French throne. It is recorded that his mother, the Duchess of Berry, made a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to the shrine of Our Lady of Liesse after his baptism. Perhaps Browning had this in mind.

295. *Give the Legations to the Pope once more*: the Legations were the population of the provinces of the Pontifical dominions. The final blow to the temporal power of the Pope was given when the last of his temporal kingdom, Rome, was taken away from him in October, 1870, when by vote of the people they became the subjects of the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel.

299. *And Henry, the Desired One*: the Count de Chambord, who was one of the aspirants to the French throne, and whose family had been deposed about twenty years before in 1848, upon the inauguration of the second Republic.

415. *Velleity*: a desire so weak that it does not urge toward the attainment of the object.

427. *Lignum vite*: Guaiacum wood, used medicinally.  
— *Grains of Paradise*: an aromatic drug.

429. *The rose of Jericho*: belongs to the order Cruci-

feræ. It grows on the sandy deserts of Arabia, on rubbish, roofs of houses, and other such situations. A small plant, six inches high, with small white flowers. After flowering, the leaves fall off, and the branches curve inward toward the centre, so that it looks like a little globe. In this shape it is blown about, and if it falls into the water the branches open out again, the pods open and let out the seeds. This property gave rise to a superstitious regard for it. Tradition affirms that when Joseph and Mary were taking their flight into Egypt, one of these flowers sprang up to mark every spot where they rested; hence it is called Saint Mary's rose.

430. *Holy-thorn*: several plants from which Christ's crown of thorns is supposed to have been made are called "holy-thorn." Among them are the holly, the white-thorn, and the black-thorn. Whichever is so considered, is supposed to have many virtues, and is used as a divining rod and for the cure of many diseases.—*Passion-flower*: so called because regarded as a symbol of Christ's passion. The five anthers resemble the five wounds received by Christ when nailed to the cross; the three-parted style, the three nails which pierced each hand and his feet. The pillar of the cross is seen in the central receptacle; the crown of thorns in the filaments; the nimbus, which surrounds the sacred head, in the calyx.

437. *Monkshood*: aconite, a poisonous plant used for medicinal purposes.—*Belladonna*: so named because anciently supposed to be the form of an enchantress, a poisonous plant used in medicine.

727. *Queen of the Camellias*: "La Dame aux Camélias," a celebrated work by Alexandre Dumas.

771. *Miranda* . . . presents a Blake: Blake's art is somewhat crude and unfinished in technique.

772. *Be Clara* — Meissonier. Meissonier is celebrated for the delicate finish of his work.

780. *Michelagnolo*: same as Michael Angelo, the great Italian painter, whose work stands for strength and grandeur (1475-1564).

787. *Painted-peacock*: a butterfly, the scientific name of which is *Vanessa*.

788. *Brimstone-wing*: a butterfly, so called on account of its bright yellow color. Its scientific name is the *Gonopteryx Rhamni*.

#### THE INN ALBUM.

**The Inn Album** is a little character-drama in narrative form, its descriptive bits serving, however, merely as stage directions and scene-setting for the dialogue, which is carried on by two men and two women whose lives and loves are tragically interwoven.

As the poem opens, the elder man is casting up in the margin of the *Inn Album*, at daybreak, the amount he has lost in the night's gambling. He had been expecting to fleece his rich young protégé on this his last chance at his purse before he settles down, at his advice, and marries his cousin of the "Place" near by. The youth had expected the same result from this farewell game, and lent himself willingly to it, the plan being that he is to feign arrival at the railway-station that morning at the same time that his friend leaves it. The warm-hearted young millionaire now presses the penniless noble to let the loss go. It may stand as an acknowledgment of his tutelage of him ever since he had found him mooning over a love-disappointment, and saved him from moping his life away. This offer the *roué* is too wary to accept, and as he prepares to depart, they decide to walk to the station.

II. On their way the boy overflows with humble and affectionate admiration of his noble friend, and wonders how with such coolness and ability his tutor in worldliness has never become either rich, great, or happy. The elder finally confides his conviction that his ill-luck for the past four years is the curse attending a certain love-adventure. He had then crowned his long list of conquests with the *love of the most beautiful girl he had ever deceived*. Her *nature, however*, was of so strong and exalted a kind that

just the genuineness which led her to trust him wholly turned her inflexible when he himself revealed the malicious deceit that had animated him, and the offer of marriage her scorn had stung him into making was contemptuously rejected. Various coincidences cause both men to suspect that their past lives have circled about the same woman, but one circumstance of misinformation prevents this from being made clear.

While they exchange confidences the train rolls by. The youth seizes the occasion, now that they have missed the train, to declare that he will go and tell his aunt the truth about his passing the night before at the Inn, and do his best to prevail upon her to receive his friend, in spite of his unsavory reputation as a profligate.

III. Meantime, two women arrive at the Inn which the two men have left, the cousin and a former school friend, whom she has begged to leave her four years' secluded happiness of married life in order to come to her. She trembles lest her approaching marriage be less good than it seems to promise, and she would fain rest upon her trusted friend's judgment of her cousin ere she gives him her decision. Her constant assumption in their talk together that her friend's marriage is blissful, forces from the other a revelation of its loathsome dreariness. She then urges the dismayed girl to let her return at once to her rigid seclusion which she has broken with misgiving through her love for her. She will stay at the Inn till the other returns thither with the youth. Later he will accompany her to the train, and she can afterwards write all that her riper insight may be able to divine of his character.

IV. The elder woman, left alone to her musing, is suddenly aroused by the entrance of the elder man, who returns to the Inn to await the issue of the youth's diplomacy with his aunt. The two face each other. Unmitigated horror and hatred of her old lover's base nature fills her. Blame of her as his evil genius is mixed in him with curiosity as to her marriage and the awakening de-

sire to retrieve his luck by getting control of her again. From the spiritual ruin that threatened her when his unworthiness was clear to her she saved herself by the might of her contempt for the baseness of marriage with a soul found base; but, instead of the sympathetic, gently soothing refuge of a sorrowing Magdalen which he supposes her present marriage to be, she lets him know that her yoke — self-sought, for work's sake, with a narrow-minded minister whose whole notion of this life is the duty of preaching damnation in the next — is a barren waste, utterly repugnant to her sensitive æsthetic sense and broad-minded character.

Then he pleads with her to flee with him where they may renew their lost love and repair their squandered opportunities. She listens, judges him to be again ensnaring the soul that had once torn itself away, reminds him of her husband's trust in her also, and so dooms him to his fate.

V. While he is on his knees before her, the youth returns from his unsuccessful mission. Recognizing in her the woman who had refused him because her love was not her own to give, he suspects some trick between the two; but her wise and patient friendliness and genuineness soon impress themselves upon him, and her old influence over him returns.

The older man, perceiving this, and ascertaining that she has never told her husband of her past, determines to turn both of these things, — the youth's revived love, the woman's secret, to his private advantage. He must have a word with the youth, before he leaves, he says, while she reads over in private, before returning to the Inn parlor, a message which he proceeds to write in the album.

VI. Alone with the youth, his plot at one stroke to avenge himself and pay his debt unfolds. He tells his young friend that his crowning lesson, for which the discharge of his gaming losses shall be the fee, is now to be given. Man he has taught him before. Woman is now

to be disclosed. Putting his own sinister construction on their past love for the same woman and on her present life, he assures the youth that he will find her completely at his disposal if he is only man enough to take advantage of her forthwith ; the proof of his words being that she will not gainsay his worst proposition on her return. Breaking off at the lady's re-entrance, he leaves them together, promising to return soon for thanks and good-by.

**VII.** She turns towards the perplexed youth with absolute composure ; asks him if all has been told him ; intimates that she now learns her fault in concealing her past, although she cannot account herself blameworthy ; and then inquires how he can excuse himself for consorting with so base a man ? Her loftiness and purity of soul shine out so unmistakably in her review of their talk of four years earlier when she had refused him, that the young man breaks out in a burst of loyalty and homage to his old love. He does not understand, cannot know what the elder man has written in the album, which seems to have some power over her, but he trusts her utterly and offers her his heart and hand to prove as she may choose. She reaches for his hand as the elder man re-enters, and when he sneers, "So, you accept him?" replies, "Till Death us do part." But she interrupts his triumphant tirade to make the youth read the album inscription. It is a threat to tell her husband of her past unless she yield herself to the youth.

She has guessed that the youth is above joining in such a pact, and she now justifies herself to him for using the poison with which she has provided herself, as the only way open to her to stop the mouth of her old adversary. In a flash he is at the man's throat, and he lies dead.

**VIII.** That was one other way to stop his venom. But for the dying woman who has saved the boy from the corruption of the man and called out his better nature, nothing remains to do on earth but to add to the *Inn*



album a last word acquitting him by declaring that her death was due to the villain from whom he righteously defended her.

As she dies, the pure, happy voice of the young girl returning to the Inn is heard outside.

The story is based on an actual occurrence in the life of Lord de Ros (1792-1839), a friend of the Duke of Wellington, the real facts being worse than the incidents of the poem, according to Dr. F. J. Furnivall, who, without mentioning names, says in "Notes and Queries," March 25, 1876, that the gambling lord showed the portrait of the lady he had seduced and abandoned, and offered his dupe an introduction to her, as a bribe to induce him to wait for payment of the money he had won; that the young gambler eagerly accepted the offer; and that the lady committed suicide on learning of the bargain between them. Dr. Furnivall states that he gets these details "from one who well remembers the circumstances and the sensation it made in London over thirty years ago." There is frequent passing reference to the original of the elder man, Lord de Ros, in the "Gréville Memoirs." One of these is pertinent: "Dec. 3d, 1829 . . . I went to see Glengall's play again . . . Henry de Ros, Glengall, and I . . . I was very much amused (but did not venture to show it) at a point in one of the scenes between Lureall and Sir S. Foster: the latter said, 'Let me tell you, sir, that a country gentleman residing on his estate is as valuable a member of Society as a man of fashion in London, who lives by plundering those who have more money and less wit than himself;' when De Ros turned to Glengall and said, 'Richard, there seems to me to be a great deal of twaddle in this play.'"

1. 23. *Ecarté*: a French betting game. — *Blind Hookey*: a favorite game with card-sharpers.

24. *Cutting-the-Pack*: another gambling game, subject to clever sleight-of-hand occurrences. See also line 556.

35. *Sir Edwin's dripping stag; his couchant coast-*

*guard creature*: popular companion pictures of deer by the famous animal painter, Sir Edwin Landseer, R. A. (1802-1852), the originals of which are at the Brompton Museum.

37. *The Huguenot*: one of the most familiar of the popular pictures of Sir John Millais (1829-1896). — *Light o' the World*: a symbolical picture of Christ by Holman Hunt (born in 1827), like Millais a well-known British artist of the modern pre-Raphaelite group.

39. *Salmo ferox*: the scientific name for the salmon, a painting of which is one of the wall decorations of the Inn. See line 84, also.

77. *Corot*: J. B. C. (1795-1875), the French painter, whose manner of painting is famous for its soft and dreamy effects.

108. *Ask Colenso else*: Bishop Colenso, whose scrutiny of the chronology of the Bible in his work on the Pentateuch (1862) brought discrepancies to light which give point to the supposition here that a man so good at figures could find no error in this sum-total.

164. *The Salon*: where the pictures of the year in Paris are exhibited.

165. *Chantilly*: where the French races are run.

194. *A Pisgah-view*: Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-4.

302. *As Ruskin should direct me*: John (born 1819), whose philanthropic faculty is as well known as his criticism of art. He inherited a million from his father, and administered it as if it were a trust fund, retaining but a small part for his own living expenses.

305. *Timon*: the typical misanthrope whom Shakespeare has represented in his "Timon of Athens."

327. *At Alfred's and not Istria*: Alfred's being an aristocratic club in London, established in Albemarle Street in 1808, and dissolved about the middle of the century; Istria, the notorious foreign gambling-place.

353. *Galopin*: a race-horse. — *That Gainsborough*: a picture by Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), the landscape-painter.

393. *Correggio's long-lost Leda*: Antonio Allegri (1494-1534), called Correggio from the town in which he was born. Two of his pictures were purchased by the British government in 1834 for £10,000; his "Leda" is in the Berlin Museum.

II. 29. *Unlimited Loo*: differs from limited loo in its expeditious losses, any player failing must double the pool; and a player at 25 cent loo has been known to lose \$320 in three consecutive deals.

37. *Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate*: the most talked-of contemporary three in statesmanship, prose, and poetry, respectively, that the young man could think of; but now, at date of this edition, the death as well as birth of all three can be recorded: Gladstone, W. E. (1809-1898), Carlyle, Thomas (1795-1881), Tennyson, Alfred (1809-1892).

81. *Dixzy*: D'Israeli, Benjamin (1804-1881), at the time of the poem rapidly rising into prominence, having been recognized as the head of the Tory Party in 1841, and made Premier in 1868.

169. *Ess or Psidium*: scents.

203. *Leporello-list*: the list of the hero's conquests according to the old Don Juan story, and as sung by his valet Leporello in Mozart's opera of "Don Giovanni."

340. *Magdalen's adventure*: Luke xvi. 9.

427. *Something in "Don Quixote" to the point*: "Don Quixote," chap. xlvii.

III. 164. *Raff*: Joachim (1822-1882), musical composer.

165. *Czerny*: Karl (1791-1857), mainly known for his piano exercises in *technique*.

167. *Trollope's novels*: stories of modern life by Anthony Trollope (1815-1882), numerous and extremely popular at the date of the poem.

IV. 160. *In petto*: privately, a reservation made to oneself without saying anything about it.

414. *Dickens . . . Bach and Brahms*: indicative of the special tastes of the two, the husband's utmost artistic dissipation being the novels of Charles Dickens (1812-

1870), treating of the life of the masses; while her range in music included "father" Bach, J. S. (1685-1750), and Brahms, Johannes (1833-1897), one of the most subtle artists in music among present-day composers.

686. *Bismarck*: Otto, born 1814, whose diplomacy, directed towards the unification and aggrandizement of Germany, was uppermost at the time of the poem, *i. e.*, about the middle of the present century.

V. 51. *Salvini*: Tommaso (born in 1830), the famous Italian actor of Othello and other Shakespearian parts.

59. *Bit of Latin that assures "Art means,"* etc.: "Ars est celare artem."

VII. 248. *Duffel*: coarse gray woollen or frieze cloth.

251. *Spring-time, that's the ring-time*: from song in "As You Like It," v. iii. 20, — "In the spring time, the only pretty ring time."

258. *Christ Church*: the famous college at Oxford which was founded by Cardinal Wolsey.

381. *Ne trucidet coram populo juvenis senem*: an ironical twisting to suit the poem of the saying of Horace in his "Poetic Art," — "Ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet," "Ars Poetica," 185. The literal meaning — "Nor let Medea slay the youths before the public," or in sight of the audience — Browning turns into "Nor let a youth slay the old in public."

VIII. 38. *Now Portia, now for Daniel*: referring to "Merchant of Venice," iv. i. 223 and 333, the young girl meaning that her friend acting as a judge, like Portia, will give now a judgment worthy of Daniel.


46. "*Cigno fedel*," etc.: "faithful swan," etc. The Swan-song from Wagner's "Lohengrin," of bad omen, since the marriage in that opera meant separation later.

49. *Amo te solo*," etc.: "Thee alone I love," etc. The song of Leonore from Beethoven's "Fidelio," celebrating faithful and lasting married love.

## TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

**Prologue.** This little lyric symbolizes in three different poetical figures the power of love to change the whole aspect of life, with the added thought in the last stanza that love is a revelation of the divine.

**Two Poets of Croisic.** Two friends are sitting before a fire of driftwood, watching the colored flames. The speaker calls to mind childish games when the sparks from the fire were given the names of various great ones, and their fate connected with the life of the spark. Now he wonders what coming bard or sage the flames colored by the rusting metals of the driftwood are prophetic of. He turns from this stripling's amusement to something graver. He will choose sparkles to be symbolic of souls quenched in mid-career. Going in search of such souls, he allows his imagination to drift with the driftwood to Croisic in Brittany, the first port made, for life is to be found anywhere. The two flames chosen shall herald what kind of heroes he asks of his friend — two poets who flourished a hundred years apart, each in his day having Paris at his feet. The first was René Gentilhomme, page to the Prince of Condé, who hung on the hope that he might one day be King of France, if only Louis and his brother would die without heirs, as there seemed some probability of their doing. Pending his expected accession to the throne, the Prince withdrew to a certain pleasure house, where the page enlivened the household with his poetical talents. One day when he was versifying, a sudden flash of lightning from a clear sky struck the crown off a bust of the Duke. This event gave René a sudden inspiration, which resulted in his writing a poetical prophecy to the effect that the Duke would never be king, and a Dauphin would be born within a year. Afraid of what the consequences of his prophecy might be when the Prince and his courtiers should read it, René retired from the court. A year after a Dauphin was born. The courtiers of the Duke were quick to



transfer their allegiance ; they bore witness to the prophecy, and René was immediately accepted as an inspired poet by the Parisian world. King Louis made him the royal poet, and his portrait was painted. But in spite of all these honors his name fell into complete oblivion, only to be unearthed a hundred years later by the other poet, who was interested in him through his portrait. In his attempt to trace the history of the portrait he fell in with an old gentleman who had possessed René's work, — one slim volume, — but this had been burned when his house at Nantes had been destroyed by fire. The old gentleman told him the tradition, and so perished the last trace of the once famous René. Even the portrait is no longer to be found in Croisic.

The speaker in the poem goes on to express his interest as to how an ordinary soul would feel who had been dealt with directly by God. The common affairs of life would appear, he thinks, unrealities in face of this great reality. Therefore it is better that we live this life out without such revelations, awaiting award at the end. Through our own aspirations toward beauty and truth, we get a simulated revelation which gives us a glimpse of the reality beyond, better suited to our human needs. He concludes that it was wise in René not to write any more poetry, as it would have had little interest after prophecy.

The second poet, Paul Desforges Maillard, wrote quatrains and sonnets in honor of all the belles in Croisic until he was thirty, and acquired some little fame in the neighborhood. Then he aspired to become known in Paris, and opportunely "The Academy" offered a prize for a poem on "The Art of Navigation." Paul composes one on the subject, but the critical "Forty" decide that his "perfect" production is singularly poor. Not to be discouraged, Paul sends it to La Roque, the editor of the Paris "Mercury," but he also declines it, though with compliments and the clever excuse that he cannot print it for fear of giving offence to the "Forty." *The deceived*

Paul sends back a letter of indignation to the editor for refusing his poem upon such cowardly grounds as fear of the "Forty;" and showing his true colors, the editor retorts that the poem is execrable past belief. Paul is comforted somewhat by the incense of his relatives who love him, in spite of the scorn of the Academy and the editor, for lifting them somewhat above the Croisic level.

When he begins to mumble something about kicking, his sister proposes a scheme by which he shall still make his mark. She points out to him that it was a mistake for him to announce who he was, and take his stand only on merit. Let him put away his masterpiece, and she will copy in her feminine hand some of his poems in lighter vein, and send them to La Roque with a moving epistle under the name of *Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne*. The editor, pleased at the letter from a woman, prints the poem with some flattering editorial remarks. She continues to send poems, and La Roque continues to publish and gush, until all Paris is in an uproar, Voltaire, even, lost in admiration, and La Roque in love with the fair Breton poet. Paul now thinks it time to make himself known. His sister remonstrates with him, reminding him that the fame is due to the world's supposing the poetry comes from a feminine hand. Paul is loath to acknowledge this, and insists upon making himself known to La Roque, who gives the episode a humorous turn, and proposes a visit to Voltaire. The latter does not hesitate to show his disgust, and unceremoniously turns his back upon Paul, whereupon La Roque advises Paul to retire to Croisic, as his fame is at an end. This proved to be true. Voltaire and La Roque silent, the world forgot its idol. He, however, survives still in a play of Piron's called "*Métromanie*," for which his story furnished the plot.

The speaker suggests that if Croisic had chosen to make much of its two bards, their fame would not have *died out*. Since fame seems to depend upon such external things, he goes on to propose a test by which the

worth of poets may be weighed. "He who lives a happy life is the best poet," he declares; that is, the poet who controls passions and emotions and sympathies, which would make him miserable if he gave way to them, and uses these means of might in his art, so transmuting even evil into beauty.

There is little more to be learned of the "Two Poets" than Browning tells in the poem. René Gentilhomme does not appear in any of the biographical dictionaries. The poet has probably related the main incidents of the tradition just as they came to him when he was visiting the little town of Croisic. An account of Maillard may be found in the "Biographie Universelle." It differs little from the story told in the poem. He was born in 1699, and must have been a man of some learning, since he was a member of the academies of Rochelle, Caen, and Nancy. The story of his competing for a prize offered by the French Academy is as Browning tells it. According to history, it was Desforges himself who conceived the plan of having his sister copy out the poorest of his poems under the name of Malcrais. Their reception by La Roque and the subsequent fame of the poetess is all as related in the poem. The proof of Voltaire's admiration still exists in a poem written to her and included in his works. It contains the line "Thou whose brilliant voice hast resounded upon our banks." After the *dénoûment* and Desforges retired worsted, he wrote to Voltaire, asking him to help him to find a position in Paris. Voltaire replied: "I am reminded always of the coquetries of Mlle. Malcrais, in spite of your beard and of mine; and if I cannot make love to you, I will try and render you a service. I expect to see M. —, the *contrôleur-général*, this summer. I shall look for a good opportunity to serve you; and I shall be very happy if I can obtain something from the *Plutus* of Versailles in favor of the *Apollo* of Brittany." Voltaire, however, did not, according to accounts, live up to his promises. In 1735 the "Poésies de Mlle. Malcrais de la Vigne"



were published, and in 1751 a volume of Idyls by Desforges was published. There was also an edition of his work published in Amsterdam in 1759. He died on December 10, 1772.

4. *Crusted roundabout with copper*: logs that drift to the shore from wrecks are much prized for fires. The clamps, nails, metal sheathings, etc., used in a ship's construction, remaining attached to them, are acted upon by the sea water, and the wood, becoming encrusted with deposits from the metals, gives out variously and brightly colored flames.

30. *Octogenarian Keats*: any one of Browning's age might have played this game when a little boy, and named a spark Keats, not foreseeing that Keats was to die at twenty-four in 1820, and that the long life of his spark was a poor prophecy.

47. *As Job and Hebrew name a spark*: see Job v. 7; xviii. 5; Isaiah i. 31; l. 11.

81. *Croisic*, etc.: a village on a small peninsula of the same name on the southern coast of Brittany. The name means "little cross," and was given to it from the small Chapel of the Crucifix, built in commemoration of the baptism of the Saxon colony there by St. Felix, Bishop of Nantes, in the sixth century. The following short description of the place is from Katherine S. Macquoid's "Through Brittany": "At first sight it looks like a dull little fishing-village. The port is completely enclosed by small islands, and a long artificial causeway, called the *Chaussée de Pembron*, built to preserve the salt marshes from the inroads of the sea, for there seems to be little doubt that the whole of the peninsula, including *Le Croisic*, *Batz*, and *Le Pouliguen*, was at one time an island, and that by degrees the channel between it and the mainland has transformed itself into salt-marshes. There are plenty of fishing-boats and stalwart-looking fishermen; but, following the straggling line of granite houses which surrounds the bay, we remarked that many of them were very curious, and almost

all were very ancient in appearance. Farther on is some higher ground, grassed sand-hills with furze and broom at intervals, and shaded by trees; and from this, at some distance, we saw the pier stretching into the sea. Near the pier are the *établissement des bains* and the *hôtel*. . . . There is little to see in Le Croisic itself, though it is a good plan to stay a few days there, so as to see something of the very original inhabitants of this peninsula. The church *Notre Dame de la Pitié* is not remarkable. Another chapel, *St. Goustan*, is now closed, but the women of Croisic still pray there for those at sea. From the *Mont Esprit*, at the end of the promenade called *Le Mail*, there is an excellent view of the town and harbor of Le Croisic; the town surrounded by the sandy waste of salt pans, and rising from these the church towers of *Batz* and of *La Guérande*. Beyond the harbor is the Atlantic; there is a fine sea view from *Mont Lenigo*. The population seems to be partly composed of fishermen and partly of salt-workers; but there is here, as well as in the *Bourg de Batz*, a certain separateness and exclusiveness of both costume and ideas. The people of Le Croisic call themselves *Croisicais*, in contradistinction to Bretons, but they do not seem so fine a race as the people of the *Bourg de Batz*. *Alain Bouchart*, the historian, was born at Le Croisic; and in the fifteenth century this town seems to have been rich and prosperous, the centre of the salt-trade."

83. *Guérande*: small town near Le Croisic.

84. *Batz*: another small town near Le Croisic.

85. *Where ocean gluts their promontory's breadth with salt*: see preceding note, 81.

90. *The Druids' chosen chief of homes*: there are more remains of Druidical monuments in Brittany than in any other spot where Druidism prevailed, and it is said that there is no other district in Europe where the popular Christianity has assimilated more from earlier creeds, Paganism not having been even nominally abolished until the seventeenth century. Witchcraft and the influence

of fairies are generally believed in, and charms and antidotes are trustfully resorted to. According to Reynaud, who is one of the later authorities, the Druids believed in the immortality of the soul; their god, Thesus, was the type of an absolutely supreme being, whose symbol on earth was the oak. The mistletoe, when found growing on the oak, represented man, a creature entirely dependent on God for support, yet with an individual existence of his own. Earlier writers say that they worshipped Apollo under the name of Belenus, and that they believed in transmigration of souls, their philosophy being much like that of Pythagoras. For original suggestions upon the meaning of the oak and the mistletoe in Druidism, see Fraser's "The Golden Bough." Browning, in the stanzas following, gives an interesting glimpse of customs still prevailing in Croisic which are survivals of Druidical rites.

107. *Menhir*: a stone monument, consisting of a single tall stone, said to mark the spot of a grave or possibly a battle.

160. *Hervé Riel*: the Breton hero who piloted the French ships into harbor, and saved them from the English in the reign of Louis XIV., who sent an expedition against England to restore James II. to the throne. See notes on Browning's poem to Hervé Riel in the "Pacchiarotto" volume.

165. *Gules*: the term used to denote the red color in heraldry. — *Vert*: the term used to denote green.

201. *Prince of Condé*: Henry, an important statesman during the reign of Louis XIII. His father and grandfather were Huguenots, but he strove to obliterate the connections of his house with the Huguenots by exhibiting the greatest zeal against Protestants. His old ambition changed into a desire for the safe aggrandizement of his family, which he achieved, though, according to Browning's story, not as fully as he wished.

204. *Anne of Austria*: daughter of Philip III. of Spain, born 1601; became the wife of Louis XIII. in 1615.

The royal pair lived for twenty-three years in a state of virtual separation, a result said to be due to Cardinal Richelieu, who wished to humble the house of Austria.

289. *Neat crowquill calligraph*: fine writing done with his crowquill pen, over which the inspired poet puts down his new thoughts in hurried, blurring strokes.

299. *Divinior mens*: diviner thought. Horace's phrase for "inspiration."

302. *Rhadamanthine*: adjective from Rhadamanthus, who was one of the judges of the dead in Hades.

320. *Dauphin*: the title given to the heir-apparent of the French throne.

335. *Cony-kind*: a cony is a simpleton or dupe.

360. *Simeon*: see Genesis xxix. 33.

382. *The biforked hill betwixt . . . Getic trump*: the summit of Mt. Parnassus was divided into two peaks, one sacred to the Muses, the other sacred to Apollo. The city of Delphi, at the foot of Mt. Parnassus, contained the Oracle of Apollo, where the fates were declared. *Getic* may stand for Gothic, from *Getæ*, an ancient people of Thrace, dwelling in Modern Bulgaria, later Bessarabia. Goths settled in their country and mixed with them. Jordanes, an historian, calls his history of the Goths a "Getic History." Thus this poet combined the qualities of a Greek oracle (Delphic quill) with those of Christian prophecy; Getic or Gothic standing for Christian culture as opposed to Pagan culture.

483. *As the reed is crushed . . . fortalice*: this rather complicated comparison may be simplified to read "as an old world beast tramples down reeds, when he follows a blind impulse to speed or migrate to a new land in order that life's purpose may be fulfilled through the presence of living animals, before an ice period make it unfit to support life."

488. *Fortalice*: an outwork of a fortification.

544. *Voltaire*: François Marie Arouet, French poet, historian, and philosopher (1694-1778).

577. *Academy*: the French Academy was instituted in

1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, having grown out of a little private literary club of eight members. Their officers consisted of a director and a chancellor chosen by lot, and a permanent secretary chosen by vote. The membership was limited to forty, and its object was the purification of the French language. It became an important critical body, and exercised much influence on French letters. Its tendency, however, was to crush originality.

585. *Neptune and Amphitrité*: Neptune was the brother of Zeus and ruler of the sea; his wife, Amphitrité, was one of the fifty fair daughters of Nereus, called Nereïds. — *Thetis*: another of the Nereïds, who married the mortal Peleus.

586. *Tethys*: one of the Titans who, with Oceanus, founded the older dynasty of sea-gods.

587. *Triton*: son of Neptune and Amphitrité, the trumpeter of the ocean.

588. *It's Virgil*: in the "Æneid" Virgil describes how, when the fleet of Æneas was in danger of being wrecked through the hostility of Juno, Neptune came to their rescue, dismissed the winds, and pried off some of the ships which were stuck on the rocks with his trident, while Triton and a sea nymph put their shoulders under others and set them afloat.

589. *De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois, Toulouse*: all dukes or counts more or less prominent as statesmen in France. They are to represent the winds blowing the art of navigation along.

626. *Brain-vibrios*: the vibrio is a form of bacterium.

648. "Mercury": the "Mercur de France" was an important newspaper in France, having been founded in 1672 as the "Mercur Galant."

659. *Pierian rill*: the Pierian mountains are in Macedonia, directly north of Thessaly. They were said to be the birthplace of the Muses.

669. *Crambo*: a rhyme.

727. *Roland's crest*: Roland is the invincible hero of the Carolingian cycle of romance.

761. *Deïdamia*: daughter of Lycomedes of Scyros, and mother of Pyrrhus by Achilles. — *Achilles*: son of Thetis and Peleus, one of the heroes of the Trojan war.

767. *Lady's-smock*: a flower.

786. *Brederac*: a little town in Brittany.

807. *Ad hoc*: to this.

824. *Deshoulières*: Antoinette du Ligier, a handsome and accomplished Frenchwoman, and a writer of versatility. Her "Idyls" are still remembered, though many plays and operas of hers are forgotten (1634-1694).

831. *Sappho*: a celebrated Greek writer of lyrics. Only a few fragments of her work have come down to us, but they serve to show the brilliancy of her genius. She flourished in the sixth century B. C.

870. *Dacier*: André, a learned French philologist, who translated Horace and Aristotle's "Poetics," etc. (1651-1722).

891. *Trévoux*: a town of France, fourteen miles from Lyons.

985. *Jean-Baptiste Rousseau*: celebrated French philosopher and writer (1712-1778).

912. *Donne*: John, English divine and poet (1573-1631).

966. *Phæbé*: a favorite name for heroines of pastoral romance. — *Phæbus*: Apollo, who killed the monster, Python, which haunted Mount Parnassus.

1008. *Idalian*: from the town Idalia, which was sacred to Venus.

1062. *Haut-de-chausses*: hose.

1091. *Carte-and-tierce*: a term in fencing.

1124. *Macchiavelli*: celebrated Florentine statesman. His name has become the synonym for politic and obnoxious policies, because of the principles he laid down in his work "Il Principe."

1197. *Belled the cat*: an armed conclave was held with the idea of ridding Scotland of the upstart Cochrane, who had risen from a mason to be the Earl of Mar. Lord Gray reminded them of the fable of the mice which laid

a project for preventing the ravages of the cat by tying a bell round the cat's neck. An excellent project, indeed, but who will bell the cat? "That will I," said Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus; and ever after he was called Archibald<sup>d</sup> Bell-the-Cat.

1223. *Chouse*: cheat.

1232. *Beddoes*: Thomas, a physician and poet. He imitated Darwin's scientific style in poetry (1760-1808).

*Epilogue*. This illustrates the power of love to round out the broken harmonies of life and art by a Greek tale, supposed to be told to the poet by a young girl, of a Greek poet whose lyre-string, snapping at a critical moment, was supplied to perfection by the voice of a cricket, which lighted on the crippled lyre "for mere love of music."

4. *Was it prose or was it rhyme?* the tale appears in the Greek anthology in both prose and verse, and is quoted by Strabo from Timæus and by others. The version Browning uses (except that he changes the grasshopper to a cricket) is given in Mackail's "Select Epigrams from Greek Anthology," as follows: "The strife was of the lyre, and Parthis stood up against me; but when the Locrian shell sounded under the plectrum, a lyre-string rang and snapped jarringly; but ere ever the tune halted in its fair harmonies, a delicate-trilling grasshopper seated itself on the lyre and took up the note of the last string, and turned the rustic sound that till then was vocal in the groves to the strain of our touch upon the lyre; and therefore, blessed son of Leto, he does honor to thy grasshopper, seating the singer in brass upon his harp."

65. *His Lotte's power too spent*, etc.: an allusion to Goethe's elusive manner with young women when affairs pushed him to a choice between marriage and a career, as in Frederika's case. Charlotte Buff, on whom the Lotte of "Werther was modelled," was not really one of these, but, as Goethe says, he bestowed on her "the qualities of several lovely women."





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